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# The choice is yours

**John Milbank**



**W**ant to know what bike you should buy next? Don't ask me! Maybe you picked up this issue for advice on which machine to choose, so don't get me wrong – we're more than happy to tell you the benefits – and pitfalls – of any of the thousands of motorcycles we've ridden, but as for the one you should buy? Only you can make that decision.

There's no winner in this month's group test of sports-tourers. There's no star-rating, no conclusion, just four machines that should be on your list if you're looking for a bike that's fast, fun and practical. Perhaps luggage space is your main priority. Or pillion comfort. Or simply how good the machine looks. Read the reviews, narrow down your list, and book a test-ride armed with the best buying knowledge. Or maybe you just want something very fast, but that you don't need to be a contortionist to ride, in which case forget hard luggage, and check out Suzuki's new GSX-S1000FA. It's your choice.

I went to Wheels and Waves in Biarritz this month, which was an incredible eye-opener when it comes to choice. It changed my view on custom bikes, and certainly put the hipster scene in a new light for me. Yamaha had a strong presence at the festival, promoting its Yard Built project, but that's not all the Japanese firm has to shout about – this issue sees us celebrating 60 years of the company, from the YA-1 to the MT-07, R1 and beyond.

Aptly, it was Yamaha that got me in to bikes – I was seeing a girl whose mates rode, when one of them invited me out on the back of his FZR1000 EXUP. "No, you're alright thanks". It looked terrifying. My dad was a

regular on his AJS at the Ace (back when it was more popular with hauliers than bikers), but I figured the gene was missing in me. I wanted to save face in front of the girlfriend though, so did it. Obviously, I had a massive grin when I got back, convinced another mate to try it, and we took our tests together within a few months.

This year has seen Yamaha come back with a vengeance, but who's next? It takes about three years from the point that a bike manufacturer begins development on a new machine to it becoming general knowledge. We found out that Yamaha was turning on the taps again late last year, but there had clearly been a lot of work done, and there's still a lot more to see too.

Suzuki's new GSX-S range has a highly-developed new chassis that's clearly designed for other new machines. Kawasaki has shown the potential of modern forced induction. Honda's stirring again... Choosing a bike is fun, but it's probably about to get even harder.

• **Make sure you subscribe on p118 to keep track of 2016's new bikes.**

**John Milbank,**  
**Editor**



Just a few of biking's coolest people. And me.



**Bruce's view**

It's so tempting to look to travel abroad on your bike, but we're spoilt with fantastic destinations to ride to, and through, right here in the UK. During our sports-tourer test we edged through the Yorkshire Moors and Dales – a mere stone's throw from home, and ripe with stunning views and fantastic routes to explore. Sure, we got wet, but we're all born waterproof. Get out there and enjoy our wonderful roads.

**Bruce Wilson,**  
**Deputy editor**

## Motorcycle Sport & Leisure's contributors...



**Alan Cathcart**

Alan Cathcart has been writing about bikes for more than 30 years, and riding them for even longer. He's regularly given the keys to factory prototypes and being on first name terms with the bosses of bike companies around the world allows him to bag many scoops.



**Roland Brown**

Has ridden for 37 years and been a bike journalist for more than 30. At *Bike* he ended up as deputy editor before going freelance. An author of 11 books, as a racer he was Bemsee 1300 champion 1984 and raced UK F1, Superstock and Superbike, plus World F1 races.



**Chris Moss**

Mossy has raced the Isle of Man TT, dispatched in London and ridden everything from CX500s to full-blown GP prototypes. A former chief motorcycle tester for *Motorcycle News*, the 53-year-old admits he's still loving two-wheeled life, and still learning.



**Peter Henshaw**

Peter knows his stuff – he's a former editor of this very magazine. Now a freelance journalist, he's got the same enthusiasm for anything with wheels that he's had since a child. An all-year-round biker who doesn't own a car, he has more than 40 books to his name.



**Malc Wheeler**

Editor of our sister magazine, *Classic Racer*, Malc's been riding for 50 years – starting before he legally could – and nobody has been able to stop him since. He raced in the TT for 16 years, collecting three podiums, and has a wealth of industry experience.



## MSL September

**EDITOR:** John Milbank:

jmilbank@mortons.co.uk

**DEPUTY EDITOR:** Bruce Wilson

bwilson@mortons.co.uk

**DESIGNERS:** Justin Blackmore,

Charlotte Turnbull, Fran Lovely

**PRODUCTION EDITOR:** Dan Sharp

**REPROGRAPHICS:**

Paul Fincham, Jonathan Schofield

**PUBLISHER:** Steve Rose:

srose@mortons.co.uk

**GROUP KEY ACCOUNTS MANAGER:**

Steff Woodhouse: swoodhouse@mortons.co.uk

01507 529452 / 07786 334330

**ADVERTISING MANAGER:** Martin Freeman:

mfreeman@mortons.co.uk 01507 529538

**ADVERTISING SALES:** Leon Rose:

lrose@mortons.co.uk 01507 529410

**SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER:** Paul Deacon:

pdeacon@mortons.co.uk

**CIRCULATION MANAGER:** Steve O'Hara:

sohara@mortons.co.uk

**MARKETING MANAGER:** Charlotte Park:

cpark@mortons.co.uk

**PUBLISHING DIRECTOR:** Dan Savage:

asavage@mortons.co.uk

**COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR:** Nigel Hole

**ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR:** Malc Wheeler

**EDITORIAL ADDRESS:**

MSL Magazine, Media Centre, Morton Way,

Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 6JR

**WEBSITE:** www.mslmagazine.co.uk

**GENERAL QUERIES AND BACK ISSUES:**

01507 529529 24 hr answerphone

help@classicmagazines.co.uk

www.classicmagazines.co.uk

**ARCHIVE ENQUIRIES:** Jane Skayman

jskayman@mortons.co.uk 01507 529423

**SUBSCRIPTION:**

Full subscription rates (but see page 118 for offer): (12 months 12 issues, inc post and packing) – UK £50.40. Export rates are also available – see page 118 for more details. UK subscriptions are zero-rated for the purposes of Value Added Tax.

**SUBSCRIPTION AGENTS:**

Media Centre, Morton Way,  
Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 6JR

**DISTRIBUTION:**

COMAG, Tavistock Road, West Drayton,  
Middlesex UB7 7QE. 01895 433600

**PRINTED:**

William Gibbons & Sons, Wolverhampton

The publisher accepts no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or photographs. If you are sending material to us for publication, you are strongly advised to make copies and to include a stamped addressed envelope. Original material must be submitted and will be accepted solely on the basis that the author accepts the assessment of the publisher as to its commercial value. © Mortons Media Group Ltd. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage retrieval system without prior permission in writing from the publisher. ISSN: 1478-8390

MOTORCYCLE SPORT & LEISURE (USPS:001-522) is published monthly by Mortons Media Group Ltd, PO Box 99, Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 6LZ UK. USA subscriptions are \$66 per year from Motorsport Publications LLC, 7164 Cty Rd N #441, Bancroft WI 54921. Periodical Postage is paid at Bancroft WI and additional entries.

Postmaster: Send address changes to MOTORCYCLE SPORT & LEISURE, c/o Motorsport Publications LLC, 7164 Cty Rd N #441, Bancroft WI 54921. 715-572-4595  
chris@classicbikebooks.com

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MEDIA GROUP LTD  
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WIN one of three sets of Avon Trailriders

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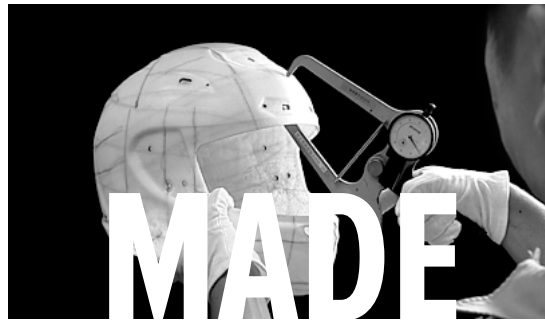
Reflections: Yamaha RD350

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Sign of the times: Steve Rose







# WORN BY THEM



PREMIUM HELMETS



# Wonderful Wales

WORDS: Bruce Wilson PHOTOGRAPHY: Joe Dick

## One to ride:

**Route:** Ystalyfera to Llandovery,

Black Mountain road

**Distance:** 25 miles

**Time:** 55 minutes

Ystalyfera's a scenic Welsh town, situated just south of the western edge of the Brecon Beacons. That's the starting place for this route, which sees you meander your way north-west of the green and heavily forested habitat, along the quiet and narrow Bethel road, passing waterfalls and fresh water streams along the way.

Trotting through a few villages, the first major reference in the journey is a right turn when you reach Brynamman, switching onto the northerly direction A4069. Exiting the town, nature is literally forced upon you, as you begin your climb up into the stunning Brecons.

Wild and open, the vast moorland offers picturesque views of greenery interspersed with the odd roaming horse or flock of sheep. Within a few miles of climbing, you've already made your way around umpteen tantalising corners, and the

smooth-surfaced road gets even better once you've reached the summit, at which point you'll find a perfectly placed lay-by on your right.

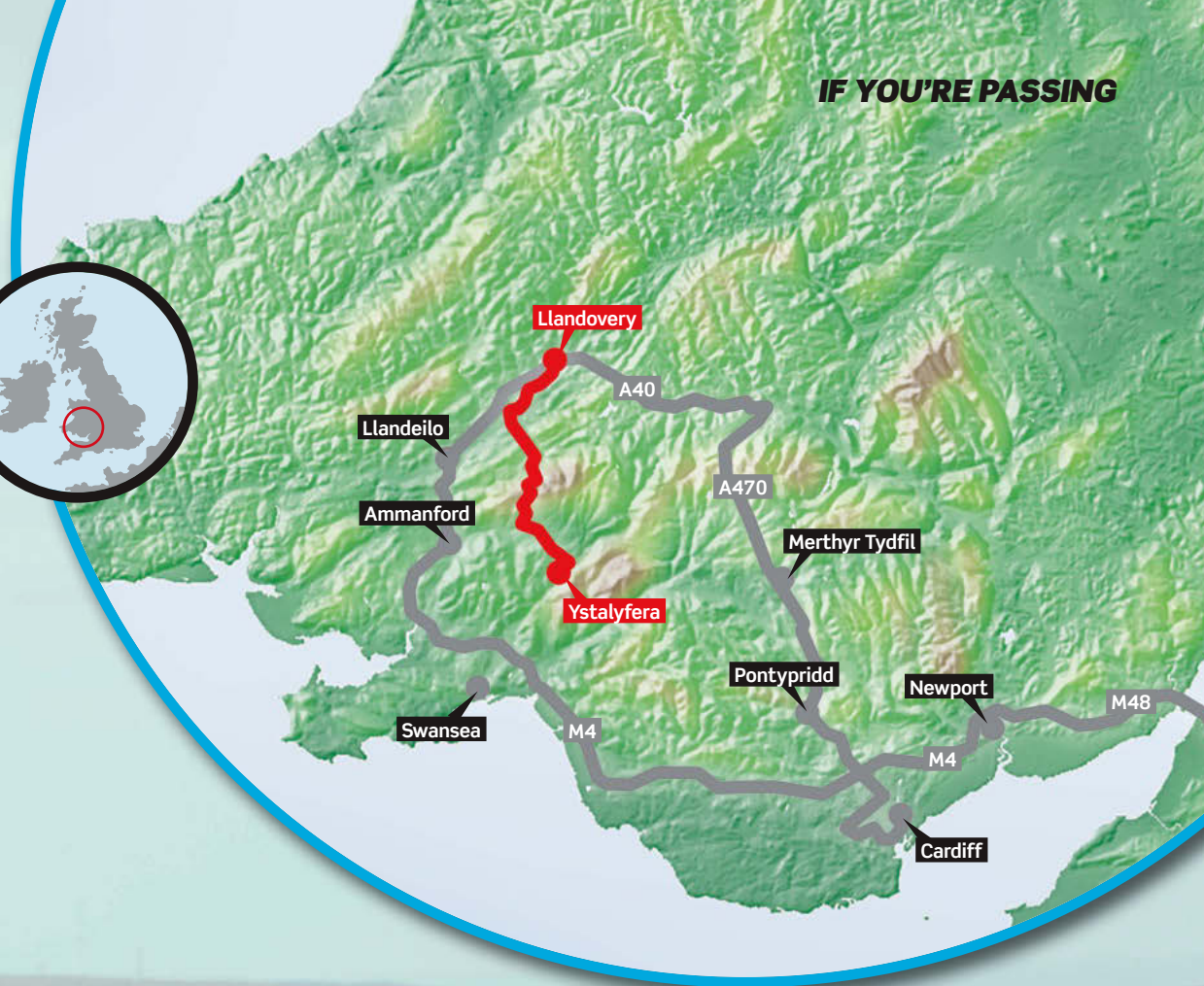
If you like your hairpins, the very next corner on this path takes some beating, tightly descending back on itself as the route begins to lose altitude. From this point forward, the road becomes something of a rollercoaster, with a steep drop to your left, and banked walls to your right. Extremely nadgery in places, the road eventually loses its intensity when you reach the

lower section, trading views of moors for enveloping woodland and stonewalled fields.

The bends are still plentiful, but the road by this point feels wider and the curvature of the tarmac is less extreme, especially by the point that you reach Llangadog. From this point, it's a short blast over to the historic and stunning town of Llandovery, where you'll find the town's central car park, which surrounds the ruins of a 12th century Norman castle; a great place to pull-up and find a moment to reflect on your ride.



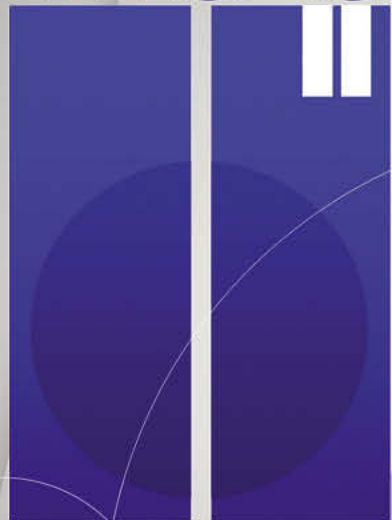
**IF YOU'RE PASSING**







# NEW AXCES



## DEVELOPMENT AT ARAI IS NON-STOP.

A perfect example of this famous Arai philosophy is the Axces II, the successor to the ever popular Arai Axces.

For the Axces II we have constructed a completely new Super fiber (SFC) outer shell, complete with the popular and proven wide-screen SAI aperture.

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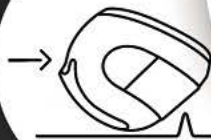
SADLY THE TRUTH IS THAT ALL HELMETS HAVE LIMITS IN THE MAXIMUM LEVEL OF IMPACT PROTECTION OFFERED WITH CURRENT TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIALS.

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[araihelmet.eu](http://araihelmet.eu)



Search for your nearest Arai dealer & other information at: [whyarai.co.uk](http://whyarai.co.uk)





# NEW

News ♦ First Rides ♦ Products

## NEW SPORT-HERITAGE MT-07

Created in parallel with Shinya Kimura's Faster Son, the XSR700 is the first machine to marry the latest tech with old-school style



**Y**amaha has been working hard on its Yard Built projects, with the Faster Son's philosophy created to introduce bikes from the more modern era – but still with a reverence for the firm's history. You can find out more about it in this issue, but the first machine to come from Faster Son is this, the XSR700.

Paying tribute to the XS650, the XSR has an 815mm high leather seat fitted to an easily customisable bolt-on rear sub-frame. Being able to modify your bike without cutting or welding the frame is core to Yamaha's Yard Built philosophy, so this is a fairly major step for the company. While the main frame looks very similar to the MT-07's, it was a one-piece unit; besides the removable rear (expect to see plenty of single-seat bikes created), a few of the mounting points have been moved slightly. Some of these appear redundant on this machine, so don't be surprised to see some more metal based on this platform very soon...

While the XSR shares the MT-07's engine, swingarm, wheels and much of the running gear, you can be sure that the simply-styled headlight won't carry the bike's wiring, as this is bound to be one of the many parts that the company promises will be offered not just in its own catalogue, but by several "globally famous professional custom builders who fell in love with the XSR700 concept".



Yamaha's MT-07-based XSR700 is clearly aimed at the Ducati Scrambler.

The new Yamaha has a wet weight of 186kg – just 7kg more than the MT-07. It shares the 282mm wavy front brake discs and four-pot calipers, as well as the wheels and horizontal rear shock with link suspension. The new 14 litre tank is aluminium, as is the front mudguard and headlight bracket.

The machine's due to be available from January 2016, with the price to be announced at Motorcycle Live, and will come in 'Forest Green' or 'Garage Metal'. MT-07s are hard enough to buy, so if you've been toying with the idea of buying one, and love the look of this, we'd suggest you place your order right now! [www.yamaha-motor.co.uk](http://www.yamaha-motor.co.uk)





## World GP legends race again

Some of racing's most iconic stars have returned for the first of what could be a stunning new series...

**WORDS:** Alan Cathcart **PHOTOGRAPHY:** Goose Live Events

History lived again at Spain's Jerez GP track, with the fire-breathing 500 V4s of the two-stroke GP era ridden by the skilful stars who raced them back then, contesting a trio of races that were very definitely the real deal, not just parades.

1987 500cc world champion Wayne Gardner grabbed the first win of the weekend aboard a 1989 ex-Randy Mamola Cagiva V589, just pipping Didier de Radiguès on a Suzuki XR89 RGV500 and Kevin Schwantz on the very same XR84 Suzuki that he defended his world title on in 1994. It was a close battle between the legends, with pole-sitter Christian Sarron dicing with Freddie Spencer for fourth place, both mounted on factory YZR500 Yamahas, after it proved impossible to source a track-worthy Honda for the American

two-time 500cc world champion to race.

In the first of Sunday's two races it was Fast Freddie's turn to take the flag ahead of Schwantz and de Radiguès – his first race victory of any kind since his AMA Superbike win at Laguna Seca in 1999. In the final contest, Schwantz grabbed the early lead, but was caught and passed by Spencer. Undeterred, the pair swapped positions several times before Kevin eventually made the move stick, to the delight of the sizeable crowd of Spanish race fans enjoying the return of the two-strokes, and the men who made them famous.

The 500GP spectaculars were the highlight of a packed weekend in southern Spain, with support races for 250/350cc and 125cc two-strokes, the latter won by four-time world champion

Jorge 'Aspar' Martinez, taking time off from his day job as MotoGP team owner. Autograph sessions, stunt shows, trial displays and two live entertainment shows each evening in the paddock added to the on-track action. British-based promoter, Nick Wigley, plans to stage four or five such events annually around the world in coming years. "The passion from the fans here at Jerez is like nothing I've ever seen," he said, "and the potential for this to become something on a global scale is really, really exciting. We hope everyone has seen just how special this can be, and we are already in discussions to take the event to more venues around the world."

Freddie Spencer said: "For us it's brilliant to be back on the 500s again. I've been riding a bike I



Gardner, Schwantz and Spencer – here's hoping we see more grids like this!

was actually racing against back in the Eighties! It's a great connection between us guys up here, the collectors who have given us the opportunity to race these bikes again, and the fans who have come along to see us. I'm truly looking forward to where this is going in the future, and being a part of it."



## Schwantz on the GP legends

Kevin Schwantz celebrated his 51st birthday over the Jerez weekend with a post-race party in the pits, and as the GP Legend who's most active today in Historic racing – quite apart from finishing on the podium of the Suzuka 8-Hours – his take on the inaugural World GP Bike Legends event is a key one. Here's what he had to say....

### ALAN CATHCART:

Kevin, what's your opinion of this weekend so far?

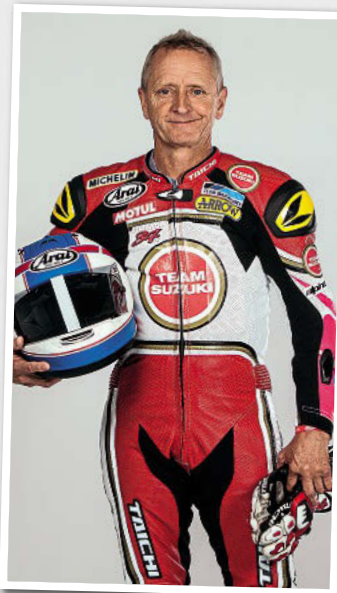
### KEVIN SCHWANTZ:

Slightly disorganised, but it's been good – we're having fun in the races.

**AC:** Do you think there's a future for this kind of event?

**KS:** We need to try and figure out how to do it without jeopardising the equipment that people have so much money invested in. When I say jeopardising, what I meant is its life expectancy. These things have such a short usable mileage before you have to tear them apart for servicing, so one weekend like this can be really expensive, before any thought of crashing them. But I think anytime a 500cc two-stroke starts up it's going to draw a crowd, so I really hope there's some way of putting all this together, maybe with some equipment that isn't quite so valuable.

**AC:** How about the solution that British collector Chris Wilson is proposing? The word Legends can apply to two different areas – star riders such as yourself, and famous motorcycles like the one you're racing here. How about splitting it in half, and having short parades of the Historic two-stroke motorcycles with you and the other stars who raced them back in the day aboard them, and then alongside that a proper race



series with specially built 600 Superstock motorcycles painted up to look like the 500GP bikes you used to race. That would allow you all to race properly without worrying about tearing up valuable equipment. How would you feel about that?

**KS:** That's probably one of the best ideas that I've heard, and maybe the most practical, too. Paint them up to make them look like the Historic race bikes, but let them be modern equipment. So, if one gets broken or crashed, it's not a half-million dollar investment gone to pot, but you'll still have the two-strokes to parade around and let people get a taste of their sight and sound, which is unique. You know, I've been to some events where they just start up the MVs without even running them on track, and that's enough to excite the crowd each day. I don't think we can continue to race the old Classic 500 V4 two-strokes, because of their fragility and the shortage of parts, but I would be up for something like that. It's not gonna be that sound of a bunch of 500 two-strokes coming past the start line, but we can give them that in the same programme if we do the parades. Let's look at it.

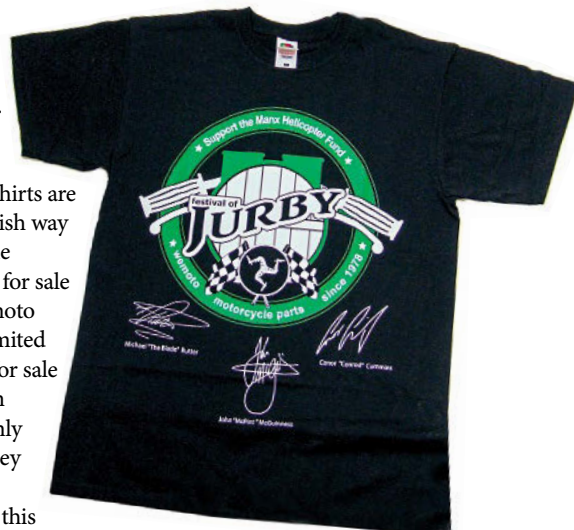
## Support the Isle of Man Helicopter Fund

Buy a celebrity-endorsed Isle of Man T-shirt from Wemoto and support an essential, life-saving service – the Isle of Man Helicopter Fund.

Helicopter ambulances are used during practice weeks and race days at the Isle of Man; in the event of an incident, they provide a quick rescue service, which is able to get to parts of the TT course that are otherwise inaccessible.

The T-shirts are endorsed and signed by John McGuinness, Conor Cummins and Michael Rutter, three

of the many TT racing legends supporting the Helicopter Fund. Designed and donated by Wemoto, the T-shirts are a simple and stylish way of donating to the charity. They are for sale now on the Wemoto website, and a limited number will be for sale at the Isle of Man Classic TT for only £10. All the money raised will go towards keeping this essential service in the air. [www.wemoto.com](http://www.wemoto.com)



## Sunday ride, Italian style

Aprilia and Moto Guzzi are offering riders the chance to add some Italian flair to their Sunday hack, with a series of test-ride events showcasing their fantastic bikes.

The next Moto Live roadshow is at the Super Sausage Café, A5 Watling Street, Potterspur, Northants NN12 7QD.

On Sunday, August 16, it's at the Ponderosa Cafe, Horseshoe Pass, Llangollen LL20 8DR, then

on Sunday, August 23, you can catch it at Ryka's Café, Box Hill, Surrey RH5 6BY.

Riders must be aged between 25 and 70, have held a full bike licence for at least one year, and have no more than six points on their licence.

To book your ride, find out more about the bikes and venues and read the full terms and conditions visit [www.motolive.co.uk](http://www.motolive.co.uk)







## Get ready for Europe's largest off-road show

The International Dirt Bike Show at Stoneleigh Park, near Coventry, has become something of an annual, must-do event for dirt biking aficionados. BUT... you don't have to be completely fanatical about off-road to enjoy the show, as it has plenty to offer fans of motorcycling, as well as families and friends, whatever you ride.

As well as product launches and the latest metal, over four action-packed days, the event will play host to adrenaline-charged entertainment and a retail hall with a variety of end-of and new season bargains.

Planning for the show is well under way – in fact it started as soon as the doors closed last year – and the major players in the off-road business have already committed, with the likes of Honda, Husqvarna, Kawasaki, KTM, Yamaha, Beta, Sherco, Rieju and Mecatecno covering the sectors of motocross, supercross, enduro, trail, trial, supermoto, minimoto and electric trials. There'll also be the opportunity to have a go on a variety of machines.

Whether it's a bike or service part, an item of clothing, footwear, helmet, accessory or even something for the track side, you'll be hard-pressed to find such a comprehensive selection of bike and rider goodies all under the one roof.

### BUY IN ADVANCE

Tickets for the Dirt Bike Show are now on sale, with savings of up to 50% over buying on-the-door.

Advance adult ticket holders aged 16 and over will pay only £8 for entry on the Show's opening day, and a family advance ticket for two adults and two children aged 11 to 15 years for Discount Thursday will cost just £24, with children aged 10 and under gaining free admission. Or, get a bunch of mates together and, for every ten adult tickets bought, the 11th Discount Thursday ticket is free! There's no booking fee and parking at the venue is absolutely free.

### GET THE APP

The official International Dirt Bike Show app offers the latest news and updates. Available for iOS and Android, it can be downloaded at [www.dirtbikeshow.co.uk](http://www.dirtbikeshow.co.uk) and provides quick and easy access to all the latest show information and features. The app will also allow you to buy advance tickets from the box office, provide venue information, assist with route planning to and from the show and, nearer the time, will display the latest show site plan.

### SEE YOU THERE!

It's on from Thursday, October 29, to Sunday, November 1, 2015, at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire. For more International Dirt Bike Show news and updates, bookmark [www.dirtbikeshow.co.uk](http://www.dirtbikeshow.co.uk) and remember to 'like' the show's Facebook page, or follow the Twitter feed.

## BT Sport to charge for MotoGP

► From August this year, customers who currently enjoy watching MotoGP (and other sports) on BT Sport for free in return for signing up to BT Broadband will face a charge of £5 per month. Only customers who subscribe to a BT TV service will continue to receive the package for free.

Sky and Virgin customers who subscribe to BT Sport have already seen a £3 rise.

If you don't mind all the effort of avoiding finding out who won, the main MotoGP race – with about a minute of coverage for each support race – is shown on the Monday evening after the race on ITV4.

## Ducati's modified bike competition

► Ducati UK has announced the 2015 Ducati Speciale Challenge – a competition to find the best modified Ducati in the UK.

The company will invite six finalists to display their machines at the Silverstone round of the British Superbikes Championship on October 3 and 4. Here a panel of judges led by Tim Maccabee – managing director of Ducati UK – will select the winner and runner up before awarding the trophies at the hospitality unit.

The winner will receive a bespoke trophy by designer Dan Taylor, £1000 of Ducati Performance vouchers and a 2016 season pass for two for Ducati hospitality at selected BSB rounds. The runner-up will also receive a bespoke trophy and £500-worth of Ducati Performance vouchers. The remaining four finalists will each receive a £250 Ducati Performance voucher.

To take part, email entries to [reception@ducatiuk.com](mailto:reception@ducatiuk.com) with images and a description of the modifications made by September 1.





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## Take part in the Norfolk 300

The Norfolk 300 is a charity ride to be held on Sunday, September 6, in support of Autism Anglia, East Anglia's Children's Hospices and the East Anglian Air Ambulance.

Norfolk is one of the UK's most enchanting counties, offering a mix of beautiful coastal roads scattered with quaint flintstone cottages, to open sweeping routes with big skies. A true delight for the motorcyclist!

The event is divided into three classes: Gold – 300 miles – for those who want to put the most miles under their wheels; Silver –

200 miles – which incorporates a Team Treasure Hunt Challenge for teams of between three and six riders/pillion; Bronze – 100 miles – aimed at those looking for a very chilled day out, with plenty of time for a long leisurely lunch en route. It's also great fun for those on older classic bikes.

There are three start points: Norwich; Great Yarmouth and Hunstanton, with start times between 8am and 10am. It finishes between 4pm and 6pm for a Bike Show at The Forum, Norwich city centre. For Gold and

Silver awards you'll need to visit all three checkpoints, for Bronze just two checkpoints.

All the entry fees of £15 per rider, or £20 for rider plus pillion, go to the charities. Sponsorship forms are also available to raise additional funds.

This promises to be a fun day out on your bike, so whether you ride a Monster or a Mobylette, a Vespa or a Velocette, you're welcome to take part. Great roads, great scenery, great fun – plot your own routes between checkpoints, stop for a cuppa



where you want. Just enjoy your bike, either on your own or with a group of friends – the choice is yours.

For more details, to see some of the great prizes on offer, and for entry forms visit [www.norfolk300.org.uk](http://www.norfolk300.org.uk).



Carla McKenzie at John o' Groats, with (left to right) Andrew Byatt, James Higgs, Lance-Corporal Ben Hilton, Paul Bleazard and Ben Clews

### John o' Groats to Land's end... avoiding the Tarmac!

As we went to press, Carla Mackenzie was setting off on a John o' Groats to Land's End adventure... keeping away from the Tarmac as much as possible. Riding her own CCM GP450, she's planned a 1500-mile route taking in as many unpaved legal roads as she can; green lanes, back roads and tracks.

She's raising money for Bike Tours for the Wounded, which offers pillion tours to wounded British servicemen and women – Carla has already given several of them pillion rides across the States by Harley. Andrew Byatt and James Higgs of the Wiltshire section of the Trail Riders Federation are taking on the whole trip with Carla, with other riders joining for certain sections.

We'll be carrying the full story of Carla's journey in a future issue of MSL. In the meantime if you'd like to contribute to the cause, go to [www.justgiving.com/Carla-McKenzie1](http://www.justgiving.com/Carla-McKenzie1)

## New jackets from Tucano Urbano

Tucano Urbano's new £109.99 all-season short jackets for men and women have a formal style, for the perfect mixture of safety and practicality. The Agos jacket for men is available in grey, red or black, while the Tina jacket for women comes in white, red or black.

Both jackets include D3O shoulder and elbow protectors, as well as a pocket to fit a back protector. There are foldable reflective inserts on the collar and cuffs, and a Find It Easy multi-pocket system.

The Agos and Tina jackets feature Tucano Urbano's Hydroscud waterproof technology, taped seams and a windbreaker polyester outer shell. [www.tucanourbano.com](http://www.tucanourbano.com)





# 40,000 miles in 16 weeks



Omo Alokwe, a business change analyst, is about to ride his KTM Adventure 1050 from Lands End to Lagos in support of international medical charity Medecin Sans Frontiers. Covering 40,000 miles in 16 weeks, he'll be riding down through Europe, then across Morocco, Western Sahara, Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Togo, Benin and Nigeria. Omo's been riding for 20 years, but this is his longest trip yet. Please donate at [www.justgiving.com/omoalokwe](http://www.justgiving.com/omoalokwe)

## BMW's Dynamic Brake Light

As part of BMW Motorrad's 'Safety 360° strategy', the Dynamic Brake Light is a 'passive safety feature'. Integrated into BMW's cornering ABS Pro, it operates in two stages: if the rider brakes from more than 50kph (31mph), the rear brake light flashes five times a second, which is said to make the bike as visible as possible to other road users.

If the speed drops to less than 14kph (9mph), the hazard warning lights are automatically activated, before being switched off once the rider accelerates back up to 20kph (12mph).

The system will be available on the following 2016 models: R1200GS; R1200GS Adventure; S1000XR; K1600GT; GTL and GTL Exclusive (as standard).

## In memory of Dr John

It is with the heaviest of hearts that we report the death of Dr John Hinds, one of the revered flying doctors that provided crucial medical support for the Irish road-racing scene. The 35-year-old from Tandragee was supporting the racing at Skerries near Dublin in early July when he died in an accident. Dr John saved so many lives in his role on track, and was hugely respected in his day job as a consultant in Craigavon hospital in County Armagh.

The sport owes him so much, and to repay his tireless efforts we'd urge you to support his campaign for an air ambulance service in Northern Ireland at [bit.ly/drjohnscampaign](http://bit.ly/drjohnscampaign)



## Keep it clean with a Ductail

The Ductail from Pyramid Plastics is designed to help keep your bike clean and tidy; this extension to your numberplate protects luggage, as well as your passenger. The Ductail is also said to considerably reduce the amount of spray and debris thrown up from the rear tyre into the path of other road users.

Prices range from £9.95 to £31.50, and each Ductail varies in size and finish, according to the model you choose.

The Ductail is attached to the bike with high-bond adhesive tape that will cure in 12 hours. Once set, maker Pyramid Plastics (the inventors of the Hugger), tells us it'll stick to your bike for a lifetime. Call 01427 677990 or visit [www.pyramid-plastics.co.uk](http://www.pyramid-plastics.co.uk).

# Guy Martin to attempt land speed record



Triumph is planning to break the motorcycle land speed record at the Bonneville Salt Flats on August 23-27, 2015. With Guy Martin piloting the 1000bhp machine, the team hopes to crack

the current record of 376.363mph.

The 2015 Triumph Rocket Streamliner features a carbon Kevlar monocoque construction with two turbocharged Triumph Rocket III engines producing a

combined 1000bhp at 9000rpm. It's 25.5ft long, 2ft wide and 3ft tall. Powered by methanol fuel, the bike is competing in the Division C (streamlined motorcycle) category.





# Celebrating Suzuki's finest

I was interested in Joe Dick's views regarding the V-Strom 650 in the July issue. After almost 50 years of riding all types of machines, both professionally and for leisure, I am, like yourself 'blown away' by this bike.

I also suffer from 'ducks disease' (bum too close to the floor), but my case is slightly more acute than your good self in that I carry an inside-leg measurement of 29in. I've fitted 150mm suspension linkages and dropped

the forks 18mm in the yolks. I've also removed the rubber bungs from under the seat and fitted furniture pads on the sub-frame rails. These very simple and cheap mods have transformed the usability of the bike for me and I cannot detect any negative with the bike's handling. If anything the high-speed stability is enhanced.

The most dramatic improvement was achieved by binning the standard Trailwing tyres and fitting Michelin Anakee

3s. What a difference – in the wet especially it was purely a matter of faith, but with the 3s I can feel just what is going on. These changes have, for me, made a very good bike into a truly great bike. I have always been a serial bike changer (56 new bikes so far), but as the 'Strom approaches one year old, I have no intention of changing it. I've taken test rides on other machines, but regardless of price or badge I have found them lacking in respect to the all-

round capabilities of this outstanding piece of two-wheeled brilliance. I hope you enjoy yours as much as I'm enjoying mine.

**Geoff McManus**

*Cheers Geoff! The Suzuki really is a brilliant bike. I've sadly been unable to ride mine recently after dislocating my knee, but I'll be back on board with updates next issue. I'll certainly be having a look at what you've done. Joe*

## PR – you're doing it wrong

I currently don't have a bike, so I'm looking at various dealers for something middleweight or a bit retro. I thought I'd pop in to a dealer while on I was on holiday – they had a nice Triumph T100 for sale that caught my eye. Then I saw this sign right in front of the doorway.

I'm not sure if I'm turning into Victor Meldrew, but I really couldn't believe it and felt a tad insulted. I walked out.

I am indeed middle-aged, with no kids, no mortgage and have owned 21 bikes in the last 35 years.

Shouldn't dealers be encouraging people into their showroom, rather than insulting

a section of the motorcycle-riding public that have the disposable income to afford to buy one in the first place?

**Peter Steele**

*I posted this on our Facebook page (facebook.com/mslmag) and generally the response was the same as yours Geoff. The chances are that it's some misguided humour, but it certainly has the potential to put off many buyers who could have the money to spend. I know of a gentleman that sold his very successful business and went out to buy a new car – he was ignored for 30 minutes*



*in a Mercedes-Benz dealer, so walked into the Maserati shop down the road and bought one of their cars instead. With cash. Time is precious, but you never know where the next sale might come from. John*

## Remembering the gentleman

Just a line to say how much I enjoyed the Geoff Duke tribute in the July issue – a great article.

In my misspent youth, I remember being pulled up riding my motorcycle while allegedly exceeding the speed limit to be asked: "Who do you think you are, Geoff Duke?"

I might add that in later years, while driving a car, the question was: "Who do you think you are, Stirling Moss?"

Keep up the good work on an excellent magazine.

**Brian Haslam**

## Cyril Ayton – more memories

Before Mortons, publishing *Motorcycle Sport* (as it was then) was a hand-to-mouth affair. Its editor, Cyril, used to achieve a lot by getting material free!

My first article was about the 'Japton' – Peter Fielden and I had squeezed a JAP V-twin (from a Morgan three-wheeler) into a Norton featherbed frame. It took ages to work out that the solution was to take the front cylinder head off and put it back on once the lump was in.

Everyone wrote under their initials or a pen name – back then I was JWR – many more summers were to pass before I met the glamorous Miss Chatterton (on her 100cc Honda...). MRW was Professor Marcus Wigan – he went off to Australia.

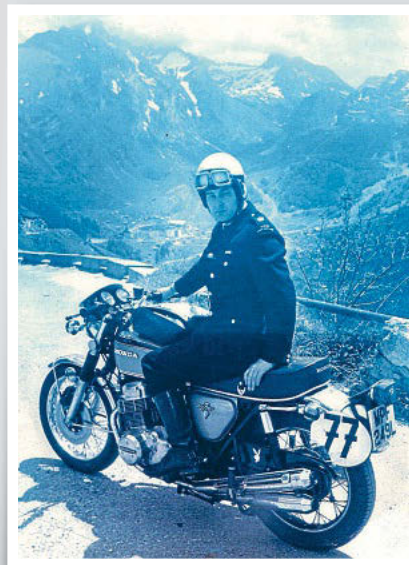
Ichabod was Allan Robinson, who won the 350cc class one year at the Circuit of the Pyrenees, a high-speed rally event for the police, military and Gendarmerie (Allan competed because he was a Special Constable).

The best-known initials were BP, Bruce Preston, one of the founders of the BMF. Cyril had to pay him though!

It is great that this best of all magazines still exists.

**JCR (John Chatterton-Ross LL.B (Hons), director public affairs, FIM)**

**Right: Allan Robinson competing on his much-loved Honda... His winning year was on a 350cc Yamaha two-stroke. The French Gendarmerie used Norton Commandos.**





# It's time we changed our perceptions

As the Met Police lead for motorcycle safety I was interested to read about your recent Bikesafe course in the August issue's editorial and also your experience of policing in general over the years.

I was glad that you found Bikesafe worthwhile and I have to say that your positive sentiments are consistently echoed by those who come out for a day with us. The team has been selected because they have a passion for biking and they work hard to break down barriers and make the day fun.

Bikesafe is an excellent way to improve your riding, your confidence on your bike and make your riding more enjoyable. I did a course many years ago and despite having done numerous riding and driving courses since, I can still remember advice that was given to me about positioning, possibly because it was the first training I'd had since

passing my test (one of those ones where the examiner was on foot and I rode round the block a few times – it was that long ago).

Your point about motorcyclists being misunderstood is well made. Despite statistically being the most vulnerable of road users, you rarely (in London at least) see headlines relating to another tragic motorcycling death. This is despite a particularly bad period of motorcyclist fatalities in the early part of this year. Motorcyclists do seem to have something of an image problem, so there is much to do to change the perception that bikers are risk-takers and address the apparent lack of public sympathy.

As I've said, the members of my team are passionate about biking and when they're not running Bikesafe courses (which we deliver thanks to a successful partnership with Transport for London), they are out tackling law-breakers with equal



The Met's Bikesafe team are just as excited about bikes as we are.

enthusiasm. After all, these are the people who not only put themselves and other road users in danger, but importantly erode whatever sympathy there might be out there for us bikers. Finally, I would encourage

anyone who hasn't thought about further training to have a go – Bikesafe is a great place to start.

**Inspector David Osborne,**  
Roads and Transport Policing  
Command

## FINDING THE BEST

Hi John, and welcome to *Motorcycle Sport & Leisure*.

I've been a reader and subscriber of the magazine for many years, but when my subscription ended and I was a bit hard up, I let it lapse. I wanted to get back to reading your fine periodical, and took a trip to my supermarket. Nope not there. I walked to the two local newsagents. Nope not there either. I tried two petrol stations. Nope and nope. Today I stopped off at WHSmith and hurrah! I couldn't help myself and with a bit of audience from others stood near me at the magazine rack I picked up the mag and raised it up... "Yes! Got it!" I said in rather too loud a voice.

So I'll now look into getting another subscription and not let it lapse again – I've always loved the non-fussy layout and smashing photos, with very interesting, witty and well thought-out reviews, as well



as stories that make you finish the article before putting the mag down.

I've attached a pic of my wife and me with the VFR photo-bombing in the background.

**Richard Sherwin**

*It's really great to have all three of you back! If anyone else has problems finding the magazine, please do let me know. John*

## The power of three

I liked the Origins of Power article in the August issue and the cogent summary of pros and cons of the various configurations, but is there a reason for leaving out the in-line triple? You have the V3 and the in-line four, so why not the in-line triple? Have I missed something?

**Richard Cluley**

*Researching the different configurations was both fascinating and challenging, as was determining which examples of configurations to run. Over time we've witnessed a huge plethora of engine types, a lot of which we simply weren't able to include owing to space in the magazine. Other great configurations we considered included the V8, V5, flat-sixes and of course your worthily noted in-line triple. On the plus side, this also presents the opportunity to look more intimately at these engines, which we'll elaborate on very soon... Bruce*



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We love to hear from you; send your letters to [msleditor@mortons.co.uk](mailto:msleditor@mortons.co.uk), or write to **Letters, Motorcycle Sport & Leisure magazine, Mortons Media, Horncastle, Lincs LN9 6JR**. You can also join us at [facebook.com/mslmag](https://facebook.com/mslmag)





# Equal rights for UK bikers?

**Leon Mannings**



**M**any potentially vulnerable groups in British society are protected from discrimination by law. In theory, legislation against unfair treatment was 'harmonised' by the Equality Act of 2010. In practice, bikers receive no protection from this legislation because motorcyclists as a group do not have one of the 12 'protected characteristics' required, such as race, sex, sexual orientation or being a transsexual. But, in case you're wondering if any of this matters when the sun is shining and open roads are waiting, I'd say it does – and probably a great deal more than you'd like.

Right now, a rising number of local authorities are pushing hard to install measures onto public roads that discriminate against motorcyclists in ways that are not only grossly unfair but also potentially dangerous for us and even more so for other vulnerable road users.

At the crux of this situation is a new mechanism for discrimination between different road user groups – and controlling who can enter key parts of public highway and who is barred. This is quite soothingly called 'light segregation' and comes in various forms that are colloquially called Armadillos or Orcas, aka Killer Whales.

As regular readers may recall, these things first reared their ugly heads as a new threat to bikers last year. Basically, they are large lumps of plastic that are around 80cm long by 13cm high and wide. They are designed to be bolted to roads at intervals to keep motorcyclists and other vehicles out of stretches of carriageway that are to be hived off for exclusive use by cyclists.

Powerful protagonists of this type of discrimination are determined to spread it across the UK because they feel that cycling is a superior mode to all others, including motorcycling.

They have a fervent drive to push councils and central government into funding schemes to 'reallocate' swathes of public road space for the exclusive use of cyclists. But, as is often the case with discrimination and segregation, life may be better for the beneficiaries but a great deal worse for those on the smellier end of the sticks used to enforce the policy. And, as is also often the case, the adverse impacts of discriminatory measures on groups who are outside favoured elites are ignored or swept under lumpy carpets by the powers that be.

However, when the adverse impacts of installing physical segregation barriers to public highways is duly considered, an alarming list of new dangers to bikers of both types and pedestrians emerges. Being tripped into the path of moving traffic more or less sums them up.

A form of discrimination against bikers in the UK is evolving that will be bad for our rights to ride, and the safety of all vulnerable road users. Unless action is taken to stop it...

The simplest way to explain how outrageous these segregation measures are is to imagine how far a plan to install them on a pavement would get. All of which begs two questions: How the hell did we get into this mess, and what needs doing to ensure that the UK does not become a country where motorcyclists will be subject to a physically dangerous and unfair form of discrimination?

Fortunately in my view, UK law against inequality makes it illegal to display signs to bar specific groups of people from accessing public places because of their skin colour, gender, or privately held beliefs. But a decision by the DfT that 'light segregation' kit to delineate cycle lanes are not 'signs', has inadvertently paved a treacherous path for dangerous discriminatory barriers to be built on public highways.

Promoters of segregation 'light' and 'hard engineering' dividers have persuaded policy makers and implementers in local and central government that because these devices don't need approving as signs do, it's okay to install them. In response to this situation, MAG has been challenging these moves for the last year and a half on the basis that they are unfair and add new hazards. But the resources available to make such challenges are tiny in comparison to far more powerful forces.

These include the companies selling segregation devices and the pro-cycling zealots who are persuading councils to buy them as the cheapest and easiest form of segregation to install.


Currently, this type of discrimination has only been imposed in a quiet road in Camden and on a trial in a road in Salford. But a rising number of UK authorities are planning schemes to enforce this new craze in segregation. Whether this type of inequality is allowed to spread depends on the effectiveness of objections. MAG just got armadillos dropped from a second trial scheme in Manchester. And, our new Roads Minister Andrew Jones MP, kindly found time for an informal chat about the problem – and promised to make further inquiries. But it will take more than that to counteract what I see as a dangerous slide towards unfair and unequal treatment as the norm for bikers in Britain.

## Who is Mannings?




Leon is MSL's political man. Working within the corridors of power Dr Mannings is consistently on the inside picking up the big political changes and whispers that threaten to change the motorcycle world we all inhabit. Always on the side of the biker, Leon is a hard-edged, educated campaigner for two-wheeled rights and has been hugely influential where it really matters



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# Test Ride





Suzuki GSX-S1000FA

# RELIVE YOUR YOUTH

Suzuki might just have created the sports bike we've all been waiting for...

WORDS: John Milbank PHOTOS: James Wright and Ula Serra

I should have seen the signs – a 2005 GSX-R1000 engined Suzuki, to be tested on the Isle of Man TT course. There's no hard luggage available in the official options – just a tank bag, with a tail-pack promised. But still I thought it was going to be a sports tourer. I was very wrong.

The new GSX-S1000FA has been carefully targeted by Suzuki – its typical buyer is expected to be an experienced 40-plus rider with an above average income. They previously owned a sportsbike and they're expected to use this for weekend rides without a pillion.

As in the GSX-S1000 launched a couple of months ago, the engine is a K5-derived 999cc making a claimed 143.5bhp (the engine spanned 2005-2008, but the K5 has the kudos). This legendary sports motor has now got 3% lighter pistons and new cam profiles designed for improved low- to mid-range power. There are also iridium plugs, as well as a friction-reducing cylinder plating.

In our test of the naked machine, deputy editor Bruce Wilson commented on the fuelling, which he felt made the bike a little snatchy; opinion was once again divided among the journalists, but I found it little distraction. If Suzuki was aiming the bike at tourers or commuters, I'd perhaps be more critical of the slightly sharp delivery when rolling on from a closed throttle. On such a sports-

orientated machine, it's more acceptable, if anything adding to the immediacy of the ride.

While ABS is standard on all the UK bikes (it's an option on the naked machine, at least until the regulations change in 2016), and there's three-stage switchable traction-control, Suzuki has done what I consider a superb job of avoiding dulling the motorcycle with technology.

If you were a fan of the GSX-R range seven to 10 years ago, there's little that will put you off here; your days of squeezing in to a race bike might have passed, but the GSX-SF offers a real alternative, positioning itself somewhere between the sports touring Kawasaki Z1000SX and the all-sport Suzuki GSX-R1000.

If you've ever hankered after the raw performance of a litre sports bike, but with a set of wide, high bars, this is the machine to buy.

When first announced, some considered the new Suzukis to be 'parts bin specials', but the tweaked engine is an inspired choice – besides its performance, it has a heritage that's perfectly suited to a machine hoping to bring bikers back to the sports market.

While it's 9kg heavier than the current GSX-R1000, it's still relatively light at 214kg (just 5kg heavier than the naked machine). This is thanks to a new frame, which is lighter and stiffer than the one currently fitted to the GSX-R; expect to see this on a soon-to-be-announced new Suzuki sports machine.







## Digital clocks



Given the motor's heritage, and the fact that this bike is designed to inspire previous sports bike owners, I'd have preferred to see an analogue rev counter. However, the GSX-S1000FA (and the naked version) has a well-designed, clear, yet surprisingly small display. It's logically laid out, showing two trips, as well as current and average fuel economy, ambient and coolant temperatures and gear position.

Yamaha may have been the first Japanese manufacturer to come back fighting after the recession, but we're expecting to see the fruits of other brands' renewed development over the next 12 months – there's clearly more going on behind the scenes at Suzuki than a new naked and street-sport bike.

## ON TRACK... I MEAN ROAD

The Isle of Man was an ideal choice of launch venue – besides the fact it hosted Suzuki's first road-racing outside of Japan in 1960, it's one of the few places beyond a closed circuit to really make use of the brilliant K5 motor.

During the rare times I dared look away from the unrestricted roads of the island, I saw up to 139mph. Streaking under the trees after Ginger Hall at 125mph, I was way off the pace McGuinness would have been hitting just a couple of weeks before, but the howl from the Suzuki's exhaust and the painted kerbs flashing by were intoxicating.

The Isle of Man's TT circuit was an inspired launch venue

## Closest Rival



### APRILIA TUONO - £13,135

Before riding it, I'd have said Kawasaki's Z1000SX, but that heavier machine is undoubtedly more on the touring spectrum. Aprilia's Tuono has a similar attitude, with a 1078cc V4 and wide bars to chuck the machine around. It's not as fully-dressed as the Suzuki, but its large top-fairing is less naked than BMW's S1000R. It's more expensive, but the more exotic machine makes 175bhp and 89lb-ft.



The GSX-S is a slim bike to ride – much more manageable than a GSX-R.



**BRAKES**

These are the same Brembo monobloc calipers fitted to the current GSX-R1000; four 32mm pistons biting 310mm floating discs, with Bosch ABS monitoring the wheel speed 50 times per wheel rotation.

**STYLING**

The designers call it 'The Crouching Beast' – the layered look of the fairing is said to emphasise the sports image, while the front LED position lights represent 'fangs'. It's 5kg heavier than the naked ABS model.

**CHASSIS**

The main frame is cast aluminium that's lighter and more rigid than the current GSX-R1000 (though as with the naked bike, it carries the same swingarm as the sports machine). Overall weight is 9kg more than the GSX-R.

**TRACTION CONTROL**

It's unobtrusive, and features three modes, plus off: '1' is for sport riding with minimal intervention; '2' is for maximum traction control in poor conditions; '3' strikes a balance ideal for most road conditions. The system compares front and rear wheel speed, throttle position, crank position and gear 250 times every second.

**COMFORT**

Compared to a current GSX-R1000, the bars are 165.4mm higher and 72mm further back. The pegs are 23.8mm lower and 32mm further forward. This is the same Renthal bar setup as the naked GSX-S1000. The mirrors are a chunkier design than the naked bike.

**SUSPENSION**

The faired bike has the same 43mm fully adjustable Kayaba forks and preload/rebound adjustable monoshock as the naked bike, but the shim stacks in the forks are different, as is the oil level.

Constantly reminding ourselves that this was a public road was vital, though you'll be pleased to know we were backing off for the junctions littering the course. This bike delivered all the exhilaration of the sportsbikes I enjoyed when I was a little more flexible, and then some, helped by the very smooth and accurate gearbox.

You do have to ask the question of where best to enjoy a bike like this without entrusting it to the Steam Packet Company, hacking across to Germany, or booking some track time. While the real action starts around 6000rpm, there's plenty below, even when pottering through town in sixth.

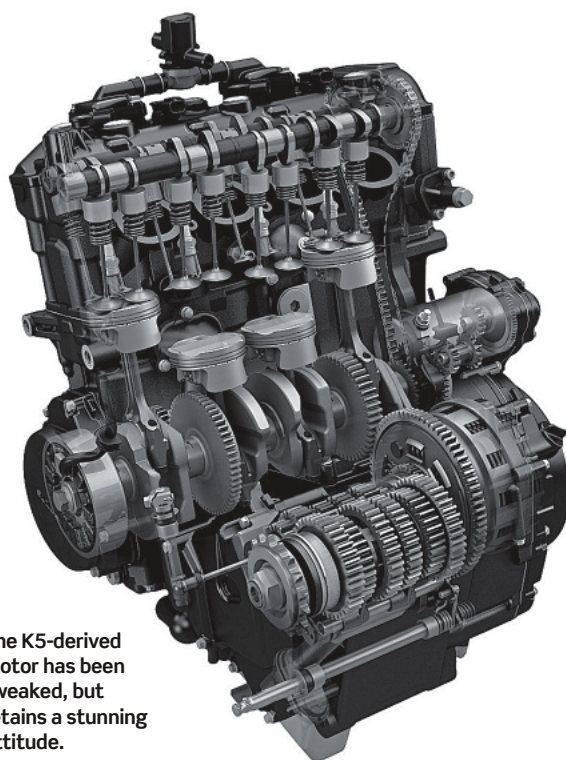
It takes some doing to stall the engine, though I did manage it when turning round at a photo-stop. Clumsy of me, but it proved the point that the wide bars and low weight make it possible to drop it almost over to the peg and still be able to catch it,

avoiding an embarrassing conversation with the Suzuki engineers.

I know we over-use the term on *MSL*, but this really is a 'real world' sportsbike. There's enough steering lock for easy U-turns, and the riding position would be comfortable all day if it weren't for the slightly more sports-design seat. It's not horrific, but by the afternoon my cheeks were starting to protest a little.

The pegs are positioned well for an easy-going position, and do little to limit the sports potential – I scraped the right-hand peg at the Gooseneck, but that was on the third pass for photos. I'd liken it to my old CBR600's pegs, which gave warning plenty earlier enough when pushing the pace.

A few of us detoured down to the south of the island for a bit of variety, finding what must be one of the British Isle's most bumpy roads. About five miles of quite violent shaking failed to upset the bikes significantly, though of



The K5-derived motor has been tweaked, but retains a stunning attitude.



## Jürgen Plaschka, chief test rider (Suzuki International Europe)

**MSL:** How much influence does Europe have over the design of Suzukis?

**JP:** Myself and a colleague from France represent the European market. We are very lucky to be involved quite early in the process – if a new bike's coming, we go to Japan quite early to give our comments and our ideas. It has quite a significant influence – we work as a team.



On the GSX-S1000F we worked on the chassis setting, response, the ABS and traction control settings... the whole package. I'm always very focussed on the steering of a bike – I always want to have it very neutral. Of course very light, easy handling, but most important for me is a neutral and precise feeling. There's no self-steering on this bike, but you don't need any effort to turn it.

**MSL:** The Dunlop Sportmax D214F tyres have been tweaked for this bike... what was the reason?

**JP:** The tyre was decided much earlier in the process, but still we can choose among many different specifications – different structures, compounds and profiles. This tyre has not a lot to do with a standard D214, mainly the silica content has been modified to offer really good wet grip. In the dry, it's not an absolutely super-sport tyre of course, but it offers really good grip. Extreme-sport tyres have a problem keeping temperature on the road, but this tyre is very good straight away.

**MSL:** The frame is lighter than a GSX-R1000 frame, but the entire machine is 9kg heavier. Is that additional weight in the engine?

**JP:** No – all over there are some parts that are a bit heavier. The GSX-R is more expensive, so you find finer pieces here and there.

**MSL:** A lot of development must have gone into this frame – will we be seeing it in another new bike in the near future?

**JP:** Yes.

**MSL:** Suzuki's presentation spoke of an eagerness to avoid gimmicks...

**JP:** We didn't want too much information on the display – there's a lot on there, but it's not over-stressing you. Everything is in one view, with not too many levels or switches. Our concept was for a pure sports-bred bike.



Wide bars, comfortable peg position... I'd be happy on roads like this all day long.

course don't expect the plusher ride of a large adventure bike – this machine is built to go fast, and the smoother roads of the mountain section were its real home.

Bruce commented on a buzz through the pegs of the naked bike – I noticed it more through the right-hand bar. It wasn't overly intrusive, though it exacerbated the tingling, dead hand I suffer with on every bike. It wasn't something other journalists complained of, and given the essential character of a motor with this kind of heritage, it'd be a shame to see it neutered for a perfectly smooth ride.

### SINGULAR PURPOSE

There really is no hard luggage option for this bike – aftermarket manufacturers might bring some options in, but Suzuki wouldn't be pushed on the strength of the rear subframe. Certainly, while the pillion perch isn't as tiny as some, it's not designed for the long-distance comfort of a tourer.

Having said that, for a ride to Germany I'd much prefer being on this to a GSX-R1000, and I'm pretty sure I'd have just as much fun – if not more – around the Nürburgring. Economy during the launch was 36mpg, but it was also one of the fastest rides I've had (and we were led by TT-winner Milky Quail); expect that number to rise significantly when riding normally!

### Specification

#### SUZUKI GSX-S1000FA

**Engine:** 999cc, in-line four, liquid-cooled

**Peak power:** 143.5bhp (107kW) @ 10,000rpm

**Peak torque:** 78.2lb-ft (106Nm) @ 9500rpm

**Transmission:** 6-speed

**Final drive:** Chain-driven

**Wheels:** (F)120/70/17; (R) 190/50/17

**Fuel capacity:** 17 litres

**Seat height:** 810mm

**Wheelbase:** 1460mm

**Weight:** 214kg

**Price:** £9999

**Contact:** [www.suzuki-gb.co.uk](http://www.suzuki-gb.co.uk)

The GSX-S1000FA has an incredible turn of speed and feels sharp, agile and truly connected to ride. The engine responds instantly, with no obvious interference from the traction control, and while I expected the bike to feel very light and twitchy at the front, even when pushing hard, and with the traction control set to minimum, the Suzuki wasn't trying to wheelie. With the traction control off, it becomes more eager to lift.

The GSX-SF is a stable yet agile bike, it's an aggressive sports machine, but it's also comfortable. It's incredibly good fun, and everything you could want to relive your youth in a little more comfort. The only thing it's most certainly not is a sports tourer.





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WORDS: Bruce Wilson PHOTOGRAPHY: Joe Dick

## Sports-tourer road test

# ALL KINDS OF DIFFERENT

They may be pigeon-holed as sports-tourers but in reality you couldn't come across a more mixed bag of motorcycles if you tried.

**W**e like to put our bikes in boxes. To define them and know exactly what they are, and the reasons why they fit in a specific category. No other class of motorcycle blurs the lines quite like the sports-tourer segment though. It is crammed full of weird and wonderful hybrids; from sports bikes with high bars and cruise control to tourers with quick shifters and stiff suspension.

In reality, two such bikes have very little in common other than their broadened horizons and 'sports-tourer' stamp. But what they both do is take a step away from the hardcore focus to make life that little bit more pleasurable. Suzuki's new GSX-S1000FA was considered by many to be a sports-tourer (including editor John, until he rode it) – it's definitely more sports than tourer.

We all hope for a motorcycle that's exceptionally comfortable on the motorway, and tremendously

sporty through the winding roads, but finding that perfect mix is something of a challenge – which one is right for you is a decision only one person can make.

There always has to be some kind of compromise, but the great news is, as our eclectic mix of options proved on a 364-mile test around the Yorkshire Dales and Moors (many of them very wet miles), there are so many great variants of sports-tourers

to choose from. Whether you like your bikes slightly more touring focused or a tad more comfort-minded, there is a sports-tourer for you, as we learned having discovered the true identities of this motley crew.



## Meet the testers

### BRUCE WILSON

An experienced road tester, *MSL*'s deputy ed has a passion for all things two-wheeled. He's the lead rider for this test.



### BEN MILLER

An enthusiastic road rider as well as a British 250GP lap-record holder, Ben knows exactly what he wants from a bike.



### ROGER JONES

Roger can't keep off a bike, often clocking in excess of 1000 miles a week, whether out with touring clubs or on his own.



### NEIL CHARLTON

An engineer by trade, Neil is a technical guru and spends his time porting cylinder heads and riding his R1200RT.





# Yamaha FJR1300 AE

£14,799 | 292kg | 47mpg average

Yamaha's FJR1300 has understandably been a big seller for many years; behind the dated looks and lardy figure lies a corker of a bike, undoubtedly better suited to touring than tearing up the racetrack. The FJR has been a stalwart in Yamaha's line-up for well over a decade, but this latest version AE-spec-model is a much advanced proposition to the earlier options.

Admittedly, much of its core has

**The FJR is more akin to a touring motorcycle, with fantastic comfort and great weather protection.**

remained the same over its several facelifts, including the in-line four motor, which is super-smooth and a delight to experience. An engine which allows you to cruise around effortlessly at 25mph in top gear before being able to wind back the throttle and bolt off using the bike's abundance of low-down torque.

Technology on the AE is plentiful, albeit basic, with two different power maps: T is more suited to touring and encourages a less sharp, delayed pick-up – ideal for when you've got a passenger on-board and you're trying to ride considerably, or economically.

S gives you unadulterated access to the Yamaha's 146bhp. Despite a hefty 292kg fuelled weight, the Yamaha is very quick to get up to pace, made all the better by its smooth and clean-shifting five-speed gearbox.

The AE is equipped with electronic suspension adjustment, controlled via a button on the left bars. The antiquated dash displays your setup, on which you can toggle between soft, standard or hard damping, with the further option of adjusting preload to suit single or two-up riding, luggage or none. Making changes is a relatively intuitive process, albeit the buttons that







make the differences feel slightly awkward to the touch and look dated.

For the majority of my ride, the bike remained in a harder setup and I was genuinely impressed by the way it hustled through bends, proving to be stable and surprisingly nimble. At slower speeds, the Yamaha required less effort than others to negotiate around town, and it was only when stopped that the true bulk of the bike could be felt. Manhandling the FJR is not my idea of fun and, despite being able to place both of my feet flat on the ground when on the



Buttons can feel a bit awkward.



## Pillion perspective:

It was comfortable once on board the big pillion seat, and it was the only bike to offer two different positions of grab handles, but I had very poor forward vision and it was the hardest of all models to clamber on to.

3<sup>rd</sup>

saddle, I found it much easier to get off and walk the bike backwards whenever necessary.

As you'd expect, this FJR is extremely comfortable. The ergonomics are very relaxed, with a spacious seat, a great amount of leg room and a natural reach forward to the bars. The bulbous fairing did a great job of keeping the worst of the weather off me (and it was a wet test), helped by the huge windscreen. By toggling through the dash menu, you can adjust the height of the screen by pushing either way on a tilt-type switch. In its highest position only the top-half of my helmet was exposed to the elements.

Other great features on the bike included cruise control and heated grips, which both came in handy on our ride. I was also a fan of the shaft drive's smooth delivery. All things considered, this bike is more sporty-tourer, than a touring-sports bike. That's not a criticism, and being comfortable, powerful and easy to ride, there's plenty of life in the old Yamaha yet.

## Second Opinion

### BEN MILLER



The FJR really surprised me; I wasn't expecting it to be half as competent as it proved. The engine is its best feature, offering loads of oomph from low down in the revs and a really smooth power delivery throughout the rev range. There's no snatch when you roll on or off the throttle, and the five speed 'box was a treat to use. The adjustable screen was a great feature, but I'd have preferred it to have been a bit taller. The brakes were also a tad weak for my liking. The styling's a bit dated for me, but that's a very personal thing.



The five-speed motor makes loads of power and can be depended on to pull away in top from low revs.

## Specification

### YAMAHA FJR1300 AE

**Engine:** 1298cc, liquid-cooled, in-line four

**Peak power:** 146bhp (107.5kW) @ 8000rpm

**Peak torque:** 101lb-ft (138Nm) @ 7000rpm

**Kerb weight:** 292kg

**Seat height:** 805/825mm

**Wheelbase:** 1545mm

**Tank capacity:** 25 litres

**Contact:** [www.yamaha-motor.eu/uk](http://www.yamaha-motor.eu/uk)





# BMW R1200RS Sport SE

£12,915 | 236kg | 50mpg average

---Perfectly rounded. That's the best way to surmise the RS, which went down a treat on our test. Everyone favoured it for numerous different reasons, with perhaps its biggest hook being its genuinely versatile nature. Comfortable yet sporting, fast yet just as suited to the slower paced stuff, the Beemer seems to get it all right, aided by a striking guise and an abundance of fantastic technology.

Being the top of the range RS Sport SE, our bike came equipped with a multitude of goodies, including differing power modes and Dynamic Electronic Suspension Adjustment (D-ESA). If you're familiar with the latest BMWs, you're made to feel right at home on the RS, which utilises not just the same tech as its siblings, but also all the same intuitive controls and systems.

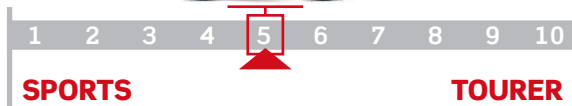
As you'd expect on a tourer, it comes with what I'd rate as the best cruise control system on the market, a two level heated grip package and an optional-extra sat-nav. On the left bar is the i-ride system, which allows you to zoom in or out of the map without having to take your hands off the bars. Quite simply, the electronics are comprehensive in quantity, well placed and easy to use.

The bike itself is a real pleasure to ride. At its heart is BMW's latest generation liquid-cooled Boxer motor, which produces 125bhp. But the gem in the engine is its ability to pull well from low in the revs, often negating the need to change down the 'box. Which is a shame, because our test bike was also equipped with the Gear Shift Assist Pro technology for throttle open up-changes, and clutchless



down-changes thanks to the self-blipper matching the crank and rear-wheel speeds.

Do this and you're rewarded with an enticingly deep burble from the exhaust, as the revs rise and descend accordingly. Technically speaking, you'd expect this kind of technology on a race bike, but it also has a well-founded



place on a tourer because it radically reduces any lull in gearshifts, so everything's nice and smooth for you and your pillion.

Speed wise, the Beemer is no slouch; with crisp fuelling you don't need massive revs to perform overtakes, even when cruising along in sixth on the motorway, sitting at around 5000rpm, the bike's eager to burst forward on request.

Handling wise, you can make the RS into whatever you want it to be. There's a range of electronically-adjusted suspension setups, allowing you to tailor the bike between being softly damped or rock hard, for a single rider or with two people on board, plus the option of increasing the preload to suit additional luggage.

I liked the bike best in the 'dynamic' mode, which makes it stiffer and more focused. It hustles into corners, aided by superb leverage from the wide handlebars, and holds a good line almost regardless of how rough the tarmac is below you.

It inspires confidence, with a fantastic attitude at lower speeds too. The weight on the Beemer is so well balanced that hovering at a near



No other bike could compete with the RS's plethora of technology, which includes electronic suspension and several riding modes.





## Pillion perspective:

**1<sup>st</sup>**

It surprised me how easy it was to swing a leg over the pillion seat, which was by far the comfiest of all four machines. The RS offered plenty of leg room and naturally placed grab handles. The only flaw was being sat too low to have a clear view over the rider's helmet.



standstill is simple, even when two-up. The general feel of the bike is relaxed, with well-placed bars and plenty of legroom complementing the spacious saddle.

You sit behind a sizeable windscreen and get genuine torso protection from the elements; the wide fairings also take the buffeting from your arms. The

bike's characterful and vibey motor can be interpreted as either a good or bad thing, but despite several hours in the saddle, I never once suffered any tingly feet or toes. The RS is that perfect mix of sportsbike and tourer, which seems capable of tackling whatever you throw its way. A truly fantastic machine.



Weather protection on the BMW was good, with the fairings and windscreen keeping the worst of the weather from reaching the rider.

## Second Opinion

**ROGER JONES**


I clocked 150 miles in one stint on the Beemer without feeling uncomfortable. Here's a bike that's really built for smashing big distances, offering great weather protection and a bucket-load of rider comforts, such as a very forgiving seat, great heated grips and an easy-to-use cruise control system. The bike's controls felt easy to use and I particularly liked the i-ride system which integrates with the sat-nav. The engine's fantastic, with loads of torque and a great character. I also liked the way this bike handled, feeling as confident with it in the wet as I was in the dry. A great piece of kit.

The Beemer is no slouch... you don't need massive revs to overtake, even sitting in sixth



## Specification

### BMW R1200RS SPORT SE

**Engine:** 1170cc, liquid-cooled, horizontal twin

**Peak power:** 125bhp (92 kW) @ 7750rpm

**Peak torque:** 92lb-ft (125 Nm) @ 6500rpm

**Kerb weight:** 236kg

**Seat height:** 820mm

**Wheelbase:** 1527mm

**Tank capacity:** 18 litres

**Contact:** [www.bmw-motorrad.co.uk](http://www.bmw-motorrad.co.uk)





## Kawasaki Z1000SX ABS

£9699 | 231kg | 48mpg average

Even to look at the big Zed makes you question its orientation; aggressive lines and a poised frontal area scream sportsbike, but sit low behind the big tank and reach out to the comfortably raised bars and you're left questioning your initial interpretation. An adjustable, albeit relatively inadequate screen, serves to throw more uncertainty into the mix, along with the fact that Kawasaki only offers the option of panniers or a top-box for luggage – not both.

But after just a few miles it's clear this is most certainly a sheep in wolf's clothing. Let's start with the engine, which is something of a beast, and relentlessly desperate to get you indulging in its effortless ability rocket up to crazy speeds. From very low down in the rev range, the in-line four motor makes fantastic power, delivered really smoothly and consistently right up to the limiter.

The midrange in particular is exceptional, to the extent that you can

afford to be in almost any gear and wind on from a really low rpm. For this reason, the Kawasaki was actually one of my favourite bikes at lower speeds, although the stiff gearbox, which often decided to find neutral when changing between first and second, had a tendency to blemish the experience.

Slow speed handling wasn't the best of the bunch – the Kawasaki responds

best to positive rider input, which can be tiring in urban environments. Increasing the preload at the rear did help the situation, and the high, wide bars, raised up from the top yoke, mean you have a lot of leverage to help muscle this bike around.

Outside of town was an entirely different experience; in every respect, this bike gets better with pace, and chucking it through some sweepers was a truly pleasurable experience. The Kawasaki is very stable, and feels a much stiffer machine to the original Z1000SX, which suffered from a soft rear shock.

The downside to riding faster is you get a broader take of how unprotected you are from the elements. The Zed's fairings are sleek to the frame, so don't offer an abundance of protection, and even in the highest setting, the screen offers little protection compared to the other bikes here. I preferred it lowered right down and out of the way – I got a chest full of wind, but was less

**The Z1000SX was enjoyed most when out of town and flowing through the corners.**





## Specification

### KAWASAKI Z1000SX ABS

**Engine:** 1043cc, liquid-cooled, in-line four

**Peak power:** 140bhp (104.5kW) @ 8000rpm

**Peak torque:** 82lb-ft (111Nm) @ 7000rpm

**Kerb weight:** 231kg

**Seat height:** 820mm

**Wheelbase:** 1445mm

**Tank capacity:** 19 litres

**Contact:** [www.kawasaki.co.uk](http://www.kawasaki.co.uk)



Technology such as cruise control was missing from the Kawasaki, reiterating its sporting bias.



## Pillion perspective:

The pillion seat felt far too small for my liking, and was tapered in such a way that I felt vulnerable when the bike accelerated. Leg space was cramped and the vision was very limited.

4<sup>th</sup>



distracted by the edges, which can tend to vibrate at speed.

In terms of comfort, the Kawasaki is a mixed bag. There's no denying the bars are kindly placed, encouraging a rather upright riding position, but the pegs are certainly more sports-focused. The seat is really firm, and proved to be the least comfortable of the lot. You could say the bike lacked quite a bit in this respect, with a couple of hours riding proving an uncomfortably long time on the bike.

Much like the VFR, the Kawasaki is certainly more of a sports bike than a tourer, as emphasised by its impressively powerful Tokico monobloc front calipers and chain drive. Its technology is more sports orientated, with two different power modes being available, along with three tiers of traction control – which can also be switched off entirely. The bike has no cruise control, heated grips or anything else, for that matter. Not that it should have to need them when you're out scratching around back lanes and having a great time down winding lanes; the kind of riding that this bike is best suited to.



## Second Opinion

### BEN MILLER



The big Kwak definitely felt much more of a sports bike than a tourer. You feel like you're sat up on the bike, with your knees bent and the tall bars angled back at you. The best part of the Zed is its strong engine, which is really smooth and keen to drive you forward hard at every request.

The brakes are good, too. The screen felt pretty useless, and the seat was really hard – I found myself trying to shuffle backwards to get a bit more comfortable. The dash was tricky to read, and the tech just wasn't there, which may bother some people.



**ABOVE:** Winding the preload up benefits the handling.





## Honda VFR800F

£10,699 | 239kg | 45mpg average

It's hard to describe the VFR800F as anything other than an iconic motorcycle, encapsulating Honda's passion for performance and V4 technology. A direct descendant of the ground-breaking RC45 race bike, there's good reason why this product

**The VFR was the best handling of the bikes on test, proving effortlessly agile and sporting.**



has such a strong sporting nature. You only have to sit on the bike to realise it's not aimed at tackling endless hours of motorway travel; it's more of a slightly-relaxed super-sport machine.

The rider's pegs cause your knees to bend back acutely, the handlebars ensure your body is lent forward; encouraging pressure on your wrists. Without making any changes, you're sat on a bike that's good to go on a track-day, or tackle the most winding of roads. This being the case, don't be fooled into thinking there's no room for comfort on the Honda.

The rider seat is reasonably sized and nicely padded; the pillion gets the same degree of luxury, too. The well-sculpted fairings aren't the most protective – or at least not without hunching yourself even lower to get behind them, and the fixed-position windscreen. For this reason, the VFR proved to have the most exposed



**The V4's fuelling felt notchy and harsh until revs picked up. It also struggled to pull higher gears at lower speeds.**

riding position of the machines on test, which made it quite unpopular when the rain began to fall.

Another downside to the Honda was its motor. Its capacity being the smallest, it also produced the least horsepower and torque, so you had to ride it harder to stay in touch with the others. But because the engine is both poorly fuelled and weak at low revs, you have to scream it around everywhere, often riding a gear lower than you'd get away with on the other machines.

This latest incarnation of VFR800 was subjected to a substantial rework last year, which included modifications to the VTEC system, which helped smooth out the variable valve timing





and lift system. Admittedly, it's now much smoother, but it also seems noisier; in this company, what this bike really could have done with is a 1000cc capacity and a good amount more oomph. As it is, peak torque isn't reached until 8500rpm, which is high by a tourer's standards and makes town riding quite awkward, which is even more challenging thanks to the forced-forward riding position.

But when you're out on the open roads and the motor's singing away in the higher revs, this bike really begins to make sense, especially through the corners.

The Honda practically falls into bends with zero effort, offering great feedback through its informative chassis. Cornering confidence is very high on the Honda, which is superbly flickable and focused. The suspension on the bike is adjustable, but there's not electronics – you're going to have to go old-school and get the screwdriver out to tweak the setup.

There are very few gismos on the VFR, with an afterthought mounted traction control switch being the highlight of the package. The bike has another button for its heated grips, but that's about all. The regally-coloured dash looks impressive, but you can soon find yourself staring hard to discover the info you're actually after, meaning your eyes are off the road for much longer than you'd want them to be.

There's no touring stalwart tech like cruise control or shaft drive, but just when you're beginning to convince yourself this bike's not suited to doing

big miles, the 21.5 litre fuel tank tries to make you think otherwise (the second largest of the bikes on test).

A bigger fuel tank isn't enough to disguise what this bike really is; a more comfortable sports bike. That's no bad thing at all, especially when used in the right context on some amazingly twisty roads. In reality, the 800's bigger sibling, the VFR1200F, is probably a much more balanced sports-tourer. But it also costs more money and fails to deliver the simple cornering pleasures that the 800 can. As it is, this is great motorcycle for a sporty rider who wants to tone it down a touch.

**RIGHT:** The traction control button is tacked onto the left bar.



## Pillion perspective:

The VFR's seat was really big and comfy, made all the better by its easy access. Pillion vision was good and I felt very supported when on it. The grab bars were considerably placed, and the leg room was generous enough.

**2<sup>nd</sup>**



## Second Opinion

**NEIL CHARLTON**



The riding position on the VFR is really sports-focused, with your knees bent sharply and a lot of pressure being placed through your wrists and on to the bars. I own a VFR myself, and I've always loved the V4 motor, but compared to the other bikes tested the engine felt pretty gutless and the fuelling was terrible.

The wind protection just isn't there either, but on a more positive note, it's an agile-handling bike that inspires confidence through the bends. I like the finish, with the clocks being a particular stand-out feature. Technologically though, it didn't wow me.



## Specification

### HONDA VFR800F

**Engine:** 782cc, liquid-cooled, V4

**Peak power:** 104.5bhp (77.9kW) @ 10,250rpm

**Peak torque:** 55lb-ft (75Nm) @ 8500rpm

**Kerb weight:** 239kg

**Seat height:** 789/809mm

**Wheelbase:** 1460mm

**Tank capacity:** 21.5 litres

**Contact:** [www.honda.co.uk](http://www.honda.co.uk)



Remote preload adjuster tucked away.



## Victory Empulse TT

# Current performance

By combining two of its brands, Polaris is hoping to expand the electric bike market.

WORDS: Roland Brown PHOTOS: Barry Hathaway and Todd Williams

**A**fter spending the majority of its 17 years building cruisers and tourers, Victory has been liberated by its parent company Polaris's purchase of Indian. With that famous old marque better placed to take on Harley-Davidson at its own game, Victory is being revamped to become the "American performance brand".

That's likely to mean big, muscular V-twins plus smaller, sportier models along the lines of the Roland Sands Design Project 156 that competed at Pikes Peak (where it failed to finish following a crash). And in the short term Victory is going electric. Earlier this year, Polaris added to its portfolio by buying electric-bike specialist Brammo and entering

the Isle of Man's TT Zero race, in which Lee Johnston and Guy Martin finished third and fourth. Now comes the first electric roadster: the Empulse TT.

As its name suggests, the Empulse TT owes much to the Brammo Empulse, which briefly went on sale here last year. In fact the TT looks almost identical to the previous Empulse, with a conventional naked-bike shape apart from the large diagonal structures (which hold batteries) beside its frame spars. Along with the styling it has the Brammo's upside-down forks, cantilever monoshock, tubular steel swingarm, 17in wheels and Brembo brakes.

In the months after buying Brammo in January, Victory's engineers concentrated on improving range. "We've developed a new battery system that fits 10% more power in the same space," says Josh Katt, product

manager of Victory's electric division. "Brammo had seven battery modules. We've combined those into two modules, one above and one below the frame, which allows us to improve cell density. We've also made lots of small improvements like a dash that shows power consumption in a more intuitive way."

The power train is otherwise unchanged, which means a liquid-cooled AC motor producing a maximum of 54bhp, along with a hefty 61lb-ft of torque delivered from zero rpm. It also means the Empulse TT retains the six-speed gearbox – an unusual feature on an electric bike, due to that flat torque curve and twist-and-go throttle negating its benefit. Victory insists it improves both performance and cruising efficiency.

There's even a clutch lever, which adds to the familiar feel as you throw a leg over the fairly







While it echoes much of the design of the Brammo, the Victory Empulse uses a revised battery and dash.



## Specification

### VICTORY EMPULSE TT

**Price:** TBC

**Engine:** Internal permanent magnet AC induction electric motor

**Peak power:** 54hp

**Peak torque:** 61lb-ft (83Nm)

**Transmission:** 6-speed

**Frame:** Aluminium beam

**Wheelbase:** 1473mm

**Kerb weight:** 213kg

**Seat height:** 800mm

**Fuel capacity:** 10.4kW-hr lithium ion batteries

**Contact:** victorymotorcycles.co.uk

low seat of a bike whose compact dimensions and raised one-piece handlebar make it feel much like a typical naked middleweight, albeit a slightly heavier one at 213kg. But the clutch is not needed to pull away because after starting the motor you just twist and go, in any gear.

Victory isn't claiming an improvement in the Empulse's performance, but the TT is quick. That near-flat torque curve means there's always acceleration on tap, and at the track launch in Colorado the bike felt much like a middleweight twin, running out of steam near its top speed of just over 100mph. It was certainly fast enough to be fun, although slightly confusing because the motor was so smooth and quiet that I had no idea how fast it was spinning unless I looked at the tach.

Handling was good, at least once the suspension had been firmed up from standard showroom settings. Brammo was one of few electric motorcycle firms to resist the temptation to cut costs with cheap cycle parts, and the TT maintains the previous Empulse's level. Both ends were well damped, geometry felt quite sporty, and the wide handlebar helped make the bike flickable through the chicane as well as stable in faster turns. Conti's Sport Attack rubber gave plenty of grip, the Victory had enough ground clearance to make good use of it, and with two 310mm discs and Brembo radial four-pot calipers up front there was plenty of reliable stopping power, albeit with no ABS. On track I stuck to the more aggressive Sport riding mode, which provides more regenerative engine braking than the alternative Normal mode, improving range.



Predictably, range was pretty poor on the racetrack. The TT went from about 70% charged to 30% in half a dozen laps, or 15 miles of mostly flat-out running. That suggests a full-to-empty range of over 40 miles on track, which should translate to well over 50 miles on the road at a decent pace. The Brammo Empulse struggled to make that distance sometimes, so Victory's claims to have boosted range by 10% seem accurate.

The team hasn't been able to do anything about the need to carry a bulky charger though. A full charge at a normal socket takes eight hours, although getting from 20% to 80% requires a more practical two hours (and a fast-charger cuts the full time to 3.5 hours). And the price will be high.

Victory hasn't confirmed when the bike will go on sale but when it does it's likely to cost roughly the £15,350 that the Empulse was listed at last year. At least a recharge will cost less than £2, and servicing costs will be minimal.

Whether that and the Victory name will be enough to make the Empulse TT a success here remains to be seen. Although it's quick, handles well and is fun to ride, familiar drawbacks of range, transmission and cost remain. Victory's brave charge into the future has begun but it won't be an easy ride.

## Victory Empulse RR

If anyone doubts that electric bikes will one day be highly desirable even for sports bike riders, a brief spin on the Empulse RR that Ulsterman Lee Johnston rode to third place in this year's TT Zero would surely change that. It's good for over 140mph, lapped the TT circuit at over 111.62mph and could be the reality of a production electric sports bike within a few years.

Just as John McGuinness's TT-winning Hondas are based on a standard Fireblade, Johnston's Victory is derived from the Empulse roadster and uses a very similar aluminium frame. But it has a bigger motor, developed by specialist firm Parker, which produces over 148lb-ft of torque, pushing power output close to 150bhp. And the racebike weighs slightly more because its 16.5kW/h battery capacity is over 50% up on the roadster's.

I wasn't aware of the weight because the RR handled superbly. Its high-quality Öhlins/K-Tech suspension gave a superbly firm and well-damped ride, its

Dunlop D212 GP tyres gripped tight, and the radial Brembos bit hard. The bike felt super-stable as well as fast, and was still pulling at 130mph-plus at the end of the straight. With no gear-changing to worry about it was wonderfully easy to ride, too, especially on an unfamiliar track.

This level of performance will take a while to reach the street, because the RR would be crazy expensive, and was designed to run out of juice after one 37.75-mile TT lap, plus a couple of hundred yards. But just as today's superbikes are quicker than WSBK winners of barely a decade ago, this stunning battery-powered bike is a glimpse into motorcycling's future.



Lee Johnston at the IoM TT.



# TECH ON A BUDGET

Yamaha's NMAX 125 has variable valve timing and ABS as standard – fancy tech for a scooter, so what's the story?



WORDS: Peter Henshaw PHOTOS: Yamaha

**Y**amaha's mission with the NMAX was to challenge the best-selling Honda PCX on its home ground, with a fuel-efficient scooter featuring more sports appeal and some big-ticket gizmos – hence the ABS and Variable Valve Actuation (VVA).

At the heart of it all is a brand new engine, one that Yamaha admits will be used by other scooters in the future.

Frictional losses are cut by a claimed 18%, with attention paid to piston rings, the cylinder bore lining, crankshaft oil seals and a roller-bearing rocker arm. The result, says Yamaha, is an ultra-efficient motor that does 107mpg on the WMTC cycle (Honda claims 133.9mpg for the PCX on the same cycle).

With a claimed top speed of 62mph, this is definitely an urban scooter, but it's as easy to ride as any other twist 'n' go (more than some), thanks to the low 765mm seat, which is still roomy enough for most of us.

Yamaha's VVA is relatively simple,

with two different cam lobes – one tailored for low-speed torque, the other for high speed power. A solenoid flicks between the two when the motor passes 6000rpm. In practice, you wouldn't know it's there, as there's no power step when the high-speed cam kicks in. Acceleration is nicely brisk from the lights and just keeps going, as linear as you like up to 50-55mph. The Yamaha is certainly fast enough to keep ahead of city traffic and it doesn't get much more manic than Lisbon at rush hour. We didn't get the chance to properly check the top speed, but I'd say there's slightly more on tap than the official 62mph.

The NMAX is light with a good steering lock and slim dimensions – perfect for wiggling to the front of a Portuguese traffic queue. The 13in wheels cope better with potholes and while the forks and twin rear shocks crashed over the city's cobbles, Lisbon does have some of the craggiest tarmac in Europe.

ABS will be the biggest draw for most buyers and though the brakes aren't linked, the anti-lock kicked in



The all-digital dash packs a lot of information into a small space.

either front or rear on dry tarmac if they were grabbed too hard. I'd be glad of this at any time, let alone a wet and greasy A40 in December. Interestingly, the NMAX isn't the only 125 with standard ABS, but it is the only one at this price.

Everyday conveniences include enough under-seat room for a full-face lid, a small cubbyhole that'll take a bottle of water and a shielded ignition lock that might resist inquisitive screwdrivers. The dash is all-digital and packed with information, including average/instantaneous mpg and an economy gauge. Fuel efficiency fetishists (of which I'm one), step this way.

## Specification

### YAMAHA NMAX 125

**Engine:** 125cc single, liquid-cooled

**Power:** 12bhp (8.9kW) @ 7500rpm

**Peak torque:** 8.6lb-ft (11.7Nm) @ 7250rpm

**Transmission:** CVT

**Frame:** Tubular steel

**Suspension:** Front telescopic forks, rear twin shocks

**Brakes:** Single 230mm discs front and rear, with ABS

**Tyres:** Front 110/70-13, Rear 130/70-13

**Weight:** 127kg

**Fuel capacity:** 6.6 litres

**Price:** £2671

**Contact:** [www.yamaha-motor.eu/uk](http://www.yamaha-motor.eu/uk)



## Shun Miyazawa - product manager, Yamaha

**MSL:** Why variable valve timing?

**SM:** It gives the best of both worlds – good torque at low revs and good power at high revs. This technology works well with small cylinders, but we will be using it on bigger engines as well – a 150 and eventually a 250. It could also be used with multi-cylinder engines like that of the TMAX.

**MSL:** Isn't ABS expensive for a 125cc scooter?

**SM:** Not really. We also wanted to be ready for compulsory ABS on 126cc and above bikes, which is coming next year in Europe. The high production volumes of the NMAX will bring economies of scale and make ABS cheaper for our other bikes.

**MSL:** Why no idle-stop system, like the Honda PCX?

**SM:** Honda has patented this. Also, we wanted to have a different alternative, which is partly why we have VVA and ABS. We can have good fuel-efficiency without idle-stop.





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## GLADSTONE NO.1

# MADE FOR DISCERNING HOOLIGANS

Eccentric? Yes, but Henry Cole and Guy Willison's first bike is everything a British bobber should be...

WORDS: Alan Cathcart PHOTOS: Kyoichi Nakamura

**T**he modern passion for political correctness has much to answer for, not least the decline in the great British tradition of eccentricity. Indeed today's Orwellian insistence on conformity has resulted in an increasingly bland global society where the art of the individual is much less practiced.

Fortunately, the world of motorcycling is one of the last bastions of the anti-PC movement, where going your own way is the norm – and few epitomise that better than TV presenter

Henry Cole, creator – together with his mate Guy 'Skid' Willison – of the Gladstone No.1 bobber, on sale to what Cole terms as 'discerning hooligans' at a price of £22,995. Just 10 of the Triumph T140-engined rigid-framed bikes will be built, nine of them for customer sale, of which eight have already been spoken for...

As an Old Etonian, David Cameron was a year below Henry at Britain's leading breeding ground for Tory party leaders, and Boris Johnson was one of his classmates. Cole, 51, is a descendant of William Ewart Gladstone, his great-great-grandfather and illustrious prime minister in Britain's Victorian era.

**RIGHT:** Faux Smiths clock is clean and minimalist.



Henry is a TV celebrity whose programmes – the World's Greatest Motorcycle Rides, The Motorbike Show and Shed and Buried series – are viewed worldwide. "My father was a gloriously eccentric, handlebar-moustached army officer, my mother a stoically aristocratic Fifties BBC presenter," he says. "I've tried anything and everything to fulfil the craving for that coveted goal of individuality. I had the dubious honour of being the first Mohican punk at Eton College, I've tried heroin addiction, I've been a session





**ABOVE AND RIGHT:** The motor's fed by a single 30mm Amal carb. T140 motors have an optional electric start.



**BELOW:** Henry Cole has had a chequered life, but sees a bright future with the Gladstone.



## Specification

### GLADSTONE NO 1

**Engine:** 744cc air-cooled, pushrod ohv, dry-sump, 360° parallel-twin four-stroke

**Power:** 54bhp at 5000rpm

**Transmission:** Five-speed with chain primary drive

**Frame:** Twin-loop, oil-bearing, nickel-plated tubular chrome-moly steel

**Fuel capacity:** 9 litres

**Seat height:** 650mm

**Wheelbase:** 1600mm

**Kerb weight:** 170kg

**Price:** £22,995

**Contact:**  
www.gladstonemotorcycles.com



**ABOVE:** Hand-made diamond-stitched seat is supported by hand-twisted string springs.

drummer, a war cameraman, a movie director, and a TV presenter, and I've lived a rock 'n' roll lifestyle. There's only one drug that's never failed to make me feel like an individual, and that's riding a motorcycle.

"With 25 years of sobriety under my belt, I'm fulfilling a boyhood dream by launching the first new British motorcycle brand to come to the market since the demise of Lord Hesketh's endeavour in 1984."

### A BRITISH BOBBER

For those not au fait with this iconic piece of Americana, the bobber was the forerunner of today's custom bikes, concocted by GIs returning home from the Second World War, usually with a Harley-Davidson as the basis.

They 'bobbed' ex-military dispatch bikes by cutting back the rear mudguard – hence the term 'bobtail' – and made them as light as possible for street racing. This didn't much happen in Britain, where function mattered, not form, making Henry's mission to bring the Gladstone No.1 to market more a symbol of present-day British individuality. Guy Willison, who jointly conceived the Gladstone, is responsible for building them; "I've known Guy since we started riding

bikes together aged 15," says Henry.

"He's a brilliant bike builder in his spare time away from being a plumber – he used to be a sound recordist for me, but left because he could make more money installing Jacuzzis. But now we're back together full time. It's just grown from there."

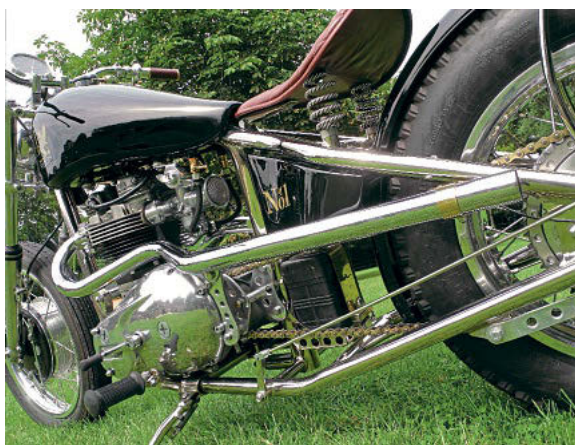
But why the bike's name? "Okay, I'm related to Gladstone the prime minister," says Henry, "but it was another Gladstone who left an impression on me – Uncle Dick 'Redbeard' Gladstone. Born in 1898, he was a true eccentric who rode the best of British motorcycles. Brough Superiors, Triumphs and BSAs jostled for position with abandoned carcasses of 18th century furniture in his garage.

"My ambition is to develop a range of hand-built British luxury motorcycles along the same theme, and I'm talking to Stuart Garner at Norton about making a Commando bobber. I've also talked to Mark Upham at Brough Superior about making two luxurious special models of our own which will be quite different than anything he'll do with the new SS100, and I'm in conversation with Gerry Lisi about using his all-new Métisse engine as the basis for a future Gladstone model."

The two partners have sourced rebuilt air-cooled 744cc Triumph Bonneville motors, all post-August 1975 when the five-speed transmission's gearshift was swapped to the left. All will breathe through a single 30mm Amal Concentric rather than the twin carbs fitted as standard – "Rideability is more important than performance," says Henry – but while later versions of the T140 engine were electric start, the motor in the No.1 Gladstone No.1 is kickstart only. Customers can specify a QPD starter using a Bosch snowmobile motor at







**RIGHT:** Henry Cole and Guy Willison with Alan Cathcart.



extra cost. Seat, handlebar and footrests can be tailored to suit.

The frame is from Métisse owner Gerry Lisi, whose Steve McQueen Replica Triumph Métisse off-roader uses a different chassis design, albeit with essentially the same engine. Like all such Métisse frames, the twin-loop chrome-moly tubular steel chassis is nickel-plated, with the dry-sump engine's lubricant in the upper frame tube – though there's a fake oil tank beneath the seat, just for the look.

The 35mm Ceriani fork at a more extreme angle than on any previous Métisse frame, and the Gladstone is devoid of rear suspension, though the fat rear 16in Avon tyre flexes a little in the sidewalls. A 230mm Grimeca four leading-shoe drum front brake is laced to a 19in rim, matched to a conical BSA 178mm SLS rear carrying a 16in rear wheel, the two combining to stop a bike weighing a claimed 158kg dry.

Top speed on the 5in pseudo-Smiths analogue speedo (with digital mileage/trip panel, but no tacho) housed in an alloy casing is 'sufficient', says Henry. How very Rolls-Royce.

## RIDING THE ONE

With a lowly 7.9:1 compression, getting the motor lit up isn't too tedious, though it's not a first-time effort from cold, at least for me. Once it chimes into life there's a delightful crack from the twin straight pipes, with the beat of a 360° two-up British parallel-twin. That crack was sufficiently muted to pass the SUV homologation test – a bit of a miracle!

The Gladstone's riding stance is stretched out, with a fair reach to that flat-set handlebar resulting in a comfy straight-backed posture. The steering is pretty light in spite of the fat rear tyre and raked-out fork. Any risks of numb-bum syndrome caused by the low seat and relatively high footrests are negated by the well-damped seat springing, which combines with the Ceriani fork and flex in that rear tyre, to deliver improbably good ride quality for a rigid-framed motorcycle.

The hand-beaten aluminium fuel tank is too slim to grip with your knees, but chill out and turn by leaning

over just enough, and trying to look cool and unconcerned by any bumps you may encounter in the road surface.

You won't be going that fast anyway, because 60mph in fifth gear is top whack before intense vibration makes itself felt. With no tacho it's hard to know where the vibes start, but short-shifting through the gearbox keeps things smooth, and the gearchange is precise with a short travel. The No.1 is geared low, making first gear almost superfluous, but finding neutral is easy, and the light clutch makes it a pleasant ride in traffic. The green neutral light on the dash is matched by low fuel and high beam warning lights – otherwise, that's it. Minimalism rules.

The Grimeca front brake works, although the rear stopper is pretty weedy. This British bobber conveys you in a relaxed, unhurried mode...

British historian David McKie wrote: "People tend to think that 'eccentric' means unusually weird and wacky. That's not the real definition: the word is derived from Latin and simply means 'away from the centre,' away from what we think of as normal, ordinary. If people didn't dare to be different, the world would be a much more boring place." I think that sums up Henry Cole and the Gladstone No.1 rather well.





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# MORE THAN JUST A PIPE

First introduced over eight decades ago, the megaphone exhaust revolutionised engine gas-flow...

WORDS: Bruce Wilson PHOTOGRAPHY: Mortons Archive

**T**here was a time when an exhaust's purpose was so very simple – to keep debris from entering the exhaust port and to redirect noxious, burnt gases to the rear of the motorcycle.

Not much thought was given to performance, especially at the turn of the 20th century when people knew very little about the importance of gas flow, or valve overlap, for that matter.

Most motorcycle manufacturers equipped their machines with constant circumference cylindrical steel piping, concerned most that their shapes weren't unduly prone to compromising ground clearance or burning the legs of the rider.

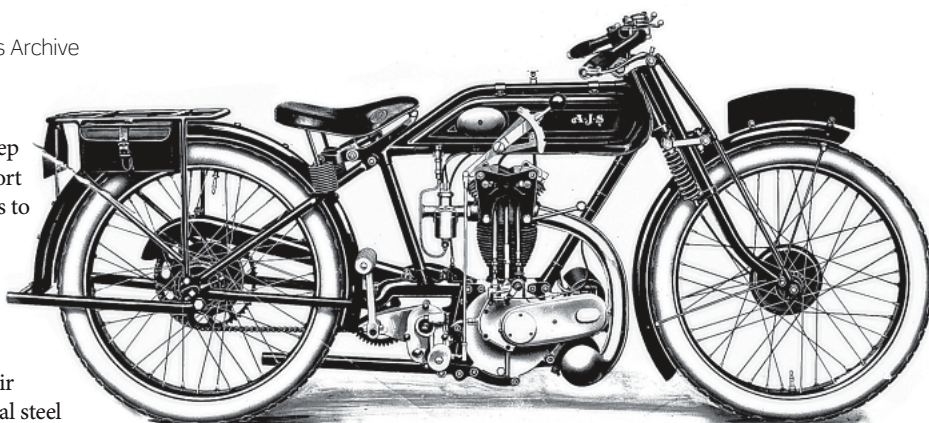
## GETTING RID OF GASES

The 1920s were perhaps the most innovative years of engine development, with an abundance of manufacturers and fantastic engineers constantly developing new and exciting methods to increase performance figures. Surprisingly, especially when you consider all the experimentation that was going on, very few people turned their sincere attention to tuning exhausts, quite simply because they didn't know how to tune them or what they should be tuning them for.

Engineers began to appreciate the restrictive effects poor exhaust gas flow was having on motors, actively hindering their ability to omit spent gases and restricting the following pulse of exhaust gases from making it down the pipework. To combat this, many manufacturers tried many different things to enhance the flow, including AJS, which came up with the 350cc Big Port, which had, as the name suggests, a big exhaust port and an accompanying larger-than-normal exhaust pipe diameter.

Although the idea was theoretically sound and the motorcycle achieved significant sporting acclaim when Howard Davies won the 1921 500cc Senior TT on his Junior TT capacity bike, the reality was that slotting a larger bore pipe on an exhaust was not the answer to the problem of gas flow. By doing this, it is likely to reduce the velocity of the gas being sent down the pipe to such an extent that the flow will essentially lose energy and stagnate, creating turbulent eddies in the pipework that, in turn, compromise the next charge of gas pulse being fired down the system.

Rudge was one of a number of other companies that also tried to improve gas flow, opting for a four-port cylinder head (two-inlet, two-exhaust), as was readily being used in the aeronautical industry. The thinking was that by having two exhausts, one from each exhaust

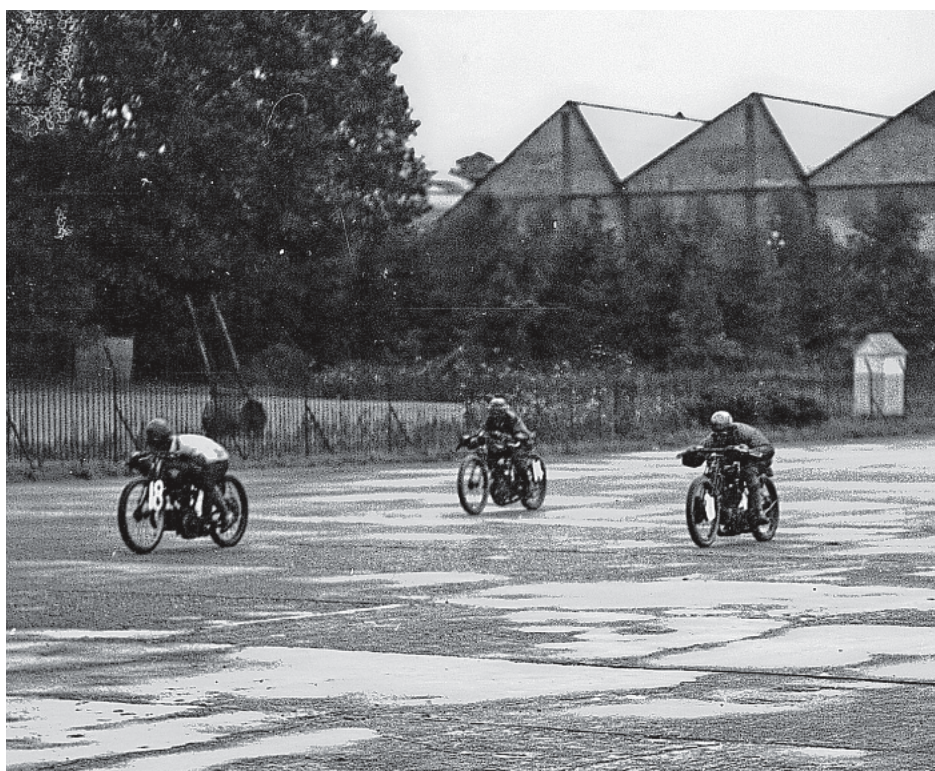


**ABOVE:** The AJS Big Port 350cc saw increases to the exhaust port size and exhaust system bore.

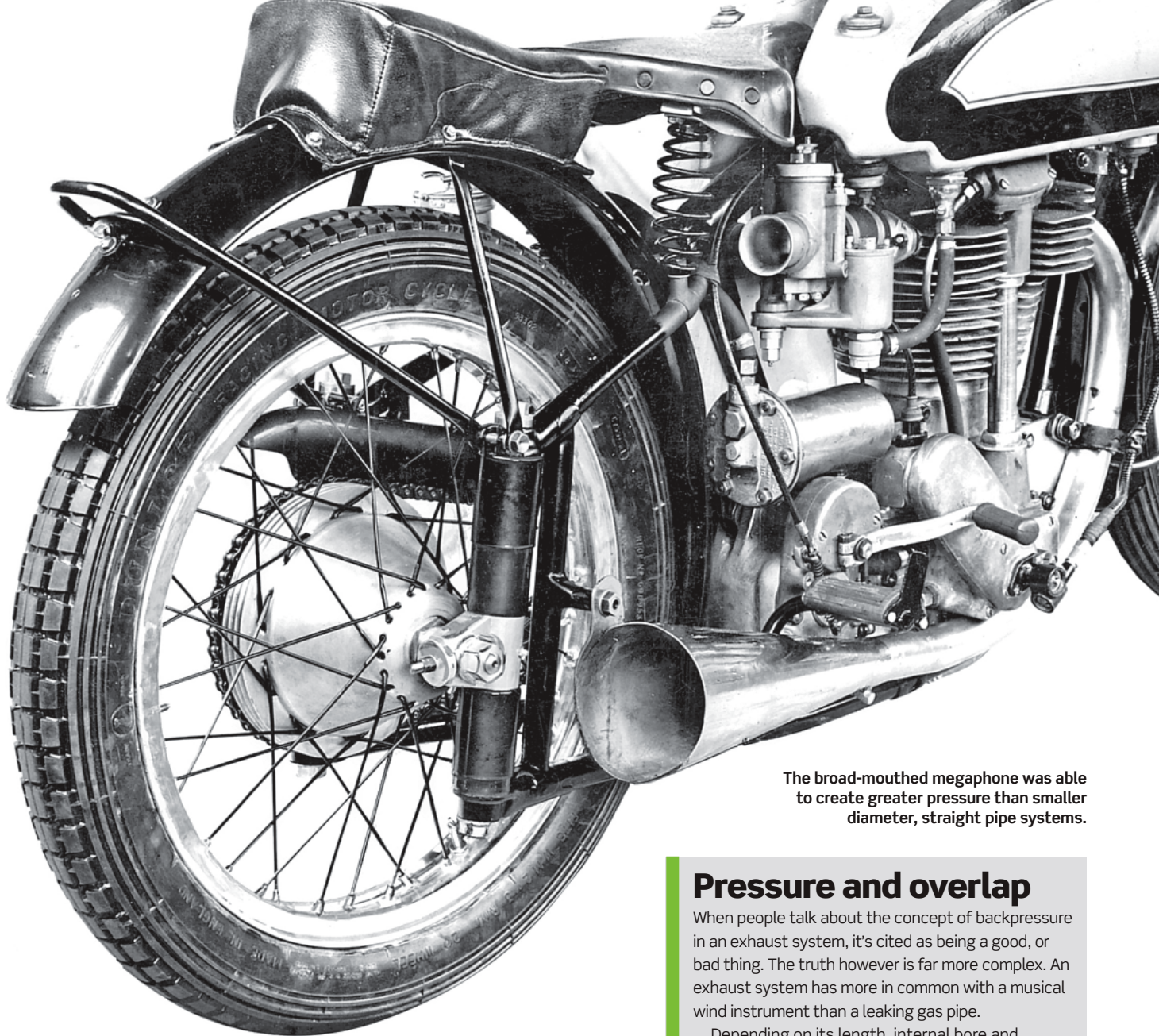
**BELOW:** Brooklands was the home of motorcycle racing during the first half of the 20th century. It was also home to aircraft manufacturer Vickers – one of many aero companies to have close links with motorcycle development.

port, twice the volume of gases would be emitted at any one time. The reality was that the split system compromised the velocity of flow down both exhaust systems, to such an extent that some people would block one of the two ports to focus the gas flow down a single exhaust.

Many other fantastical ideas were tried but, as was later to be discovered, the secret to efficient waste gas dispersion was far more complex and necessitated the understanding of many different factors, such as turbulent and laminar flow, pressure pulses moving at the speed of sound and the effect of internal steps, ridges and bifurcations.







The broad-mouthed megaphone was able to create greater pressure than smaller diameter, straight pipe systems.

## Pressure and overlap

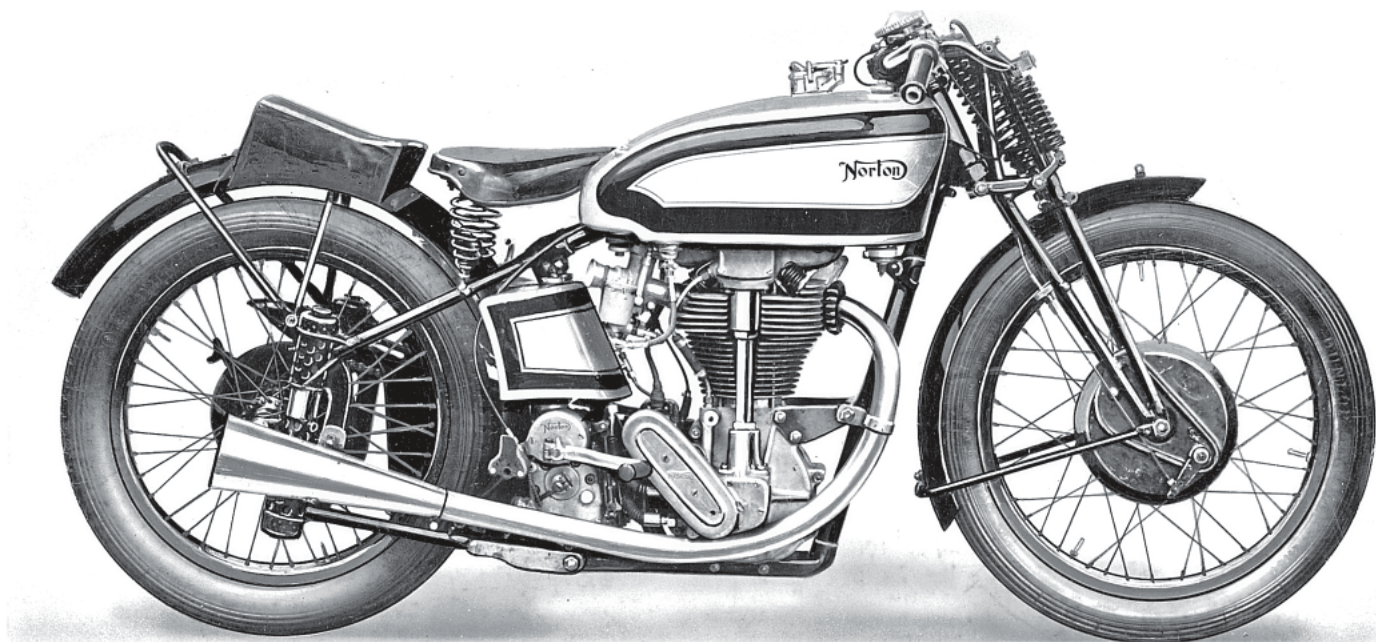
When people talk about the concept of backpressure in an exhaust system, it's cited as being a good, or bad thing. The truth however is far more complex. An exhaust system has more in common with a musical wind instrument than a leaking gas pipe.

Depending on its length, internal bore and surface finish, pressure pulses and gas flow can be tuned to perform a very specific performance melody. In actual fact, for a performance exhaust system to work effectively it should try to manipulate the exhaust gas to produce both high and low pressures at the exhaust port, at different times. For example, an ideal scenario would be for very low pressure to be present at the exhaust port at the instant the exhaust valve opens, and to a slightly lesser extent, for low pressure to still be present during the majority of the time the exhaust valve is open.

However, in certain situations it can be very beneficial for the pressure in the exhaust to build as the exhaust valve is closing. The reason for this is, performance engines utilise valve overlap, which is the time when the inlet valve is open before the exhaust valve has had chance to close. At low rpm this actually gives a window of opportunity for the fresh incoming charge to escape out of the exhaust valve (at high rpm, there isn't time for this to happen). Therefore the advantage of having high pressure at the exhaust port (facilitated by the exhaust system) at lower revs is that the escaping charge is restricted from entering prematurely into the exhaust system, as opposed to being burnt in the next combustion cycle.





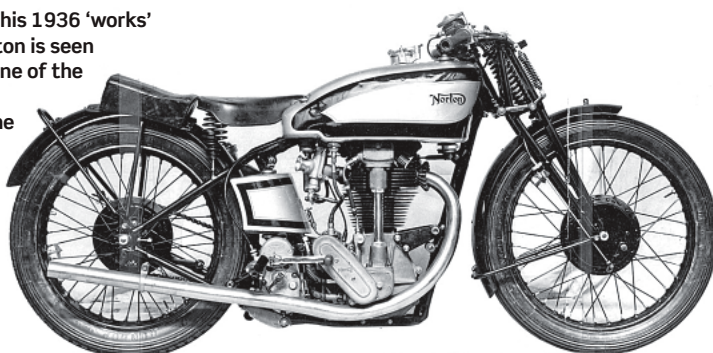


## SHAPING THE FUTURE

When exhaust gases exit a system's pipework, they are not at a constant pressure. They contain the pulse signature of the cylinder(s) combustion gas as released by the exhaust valve(s). As these pulses escape from the pipe, the opposite sign is then 'reflected' back upstream to the exhaust valves; A positive pressure pulse returns as a negative pressure pulse and a negative pressure pulse returns as a positive.

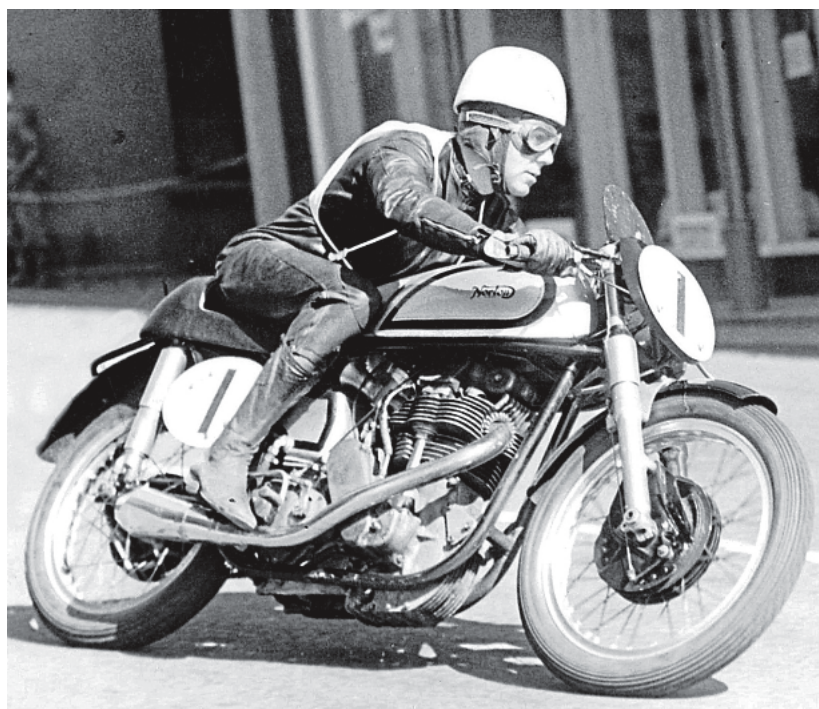
Most motorcycles came equipped with relatively similar sized exhaust pipe bores well into the 1930s, retaining the same internal diameter from the inlet of the system to the outlet. Generally speaking, a smaller pipe bore will encourage a faster gas velocity, moving at higher pressure than a larger one. But only to a point – an overly large diameter exhaust pipe will introduce turbulence into the exhaust gas, robbing the whole system of the ability to utilise pressure pulses and reducing overall flow. So the challenge was to reduce the internal flow pressure of a system, while maintaining sufficient velocity to ensure the gas pulse had the energy it needed once it reached the pipe's outlet.

**ABOVE:** This 1936 'works' Manx Norton is seen sporting one of the very first megaphone exhaust systems.



**ABOVE RIGHT:** A 1935 'works' Norton International with a straight pipe system.

**BELOW:** Geoff Duke in TT action on a Manx Norton with a 'reverse mega' system fitted.



By the 1930s, pioneering designs were everywhere, most of which had been influenced by aircraft development projects, an arena which enjoyed far greater, government-backed financial investment than the humble motorcycle industry. This being the case, aero and motorcycle exhaust orientations had very different objectives and consequent directions. But it's very likely that Norton's 'works' racing manager, Joe Craig, took inspiration from aircraft exhaust designs when he began experimenting with conical-shaped exhaust systems on his team's race bikes.

In 1934, Norton competed in the Belgium TT with a bizarre-looking race pipe, shaped similarly to a megaphone. The performance results were positive, so over the following few years the British manufacturer, along with several other firms including the German brand DKW, were to experiment with megaphone designs, culminating with Norton winning the 1938 Senior TT with its megaphone-equipped 500cc Manx racer.

While the exhaust headers remained constant in circumference, the tail end of the pipework – the megaphone section – featured a 1:8 expansion ratio that designers found aided exhaust gas flow and improved peak horsepower by a claimed 7-8%. The unique flared-shape of the system encouraged the gas stream to gradually expand as it exited the exhaust, rather than 'bursting' from a plain hole.

The upshot being that the magnitude of the reflected pressure pulses induced by the pipe exit were reduced and spread over a broader frequency. So rather than having an exhaust pipe that worked perfectly at one single rpm, but poorly at all others, the system worked reasonably across a broader rev-range.



## MEGAPHONITIS

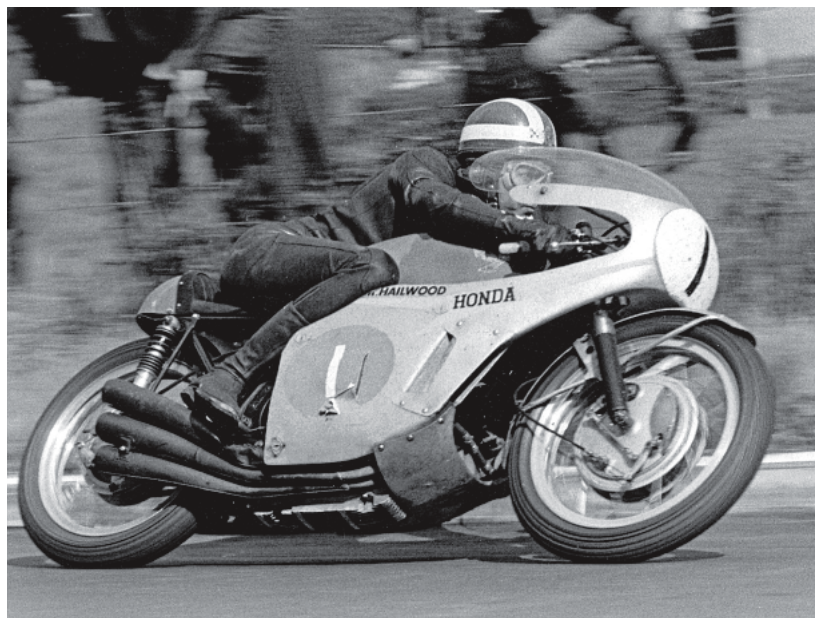
For all its many advantages, the megaphone design was far from perfect. As the new innovation became the norm in racing circles, with most major manufacturers adopting the flared ending to their exhaust systems, more and more people would come to complain of poor low down performance – ‘until it came on the mega’.

Dubbed ‘megaphonitis’, the problem with the broad-mouthed mega was its susceptibility to creating the wrong kind of pressure waves at low revs, which would bounce back down the pipework and impede the flow of exiting gases. By persisting with the throttle held open, in most cases the gas flow would eventually improve at higher revs and the symptoms would vanish. For this reason megaphones lost favour on tight and technical circuits, where it was impossible not to depend on the lower scale of an engine’s rev-range, meaning you had to ride through an area of rough engine performance before the gas flow righted itself in the top-end.

Many different ways were considered to cure the problem, including making changes to the jetting and air slide gap, but there was no magic cure. Of course, on circuits such as the TT, where the core of the racing witnesses fantastic speeds and a much higher dependency on top-end revs, the megaphone was still favourable. But in other environments, the traditional constant radius systems proved more favourable.

## THE PEASHOOTER

In a bid to improve the situation, megaphones were then produced with a ‘reversed-mega’ cap at the very end, such as the 1957 AJS 7R, which saw a 1:9 ratio of megaphone, with a reverse cone exit that was around 40% smaller than the diffuser. The change of shape altered the backpressure drastically and is claimed to have significantly helped in eradicating megaphonitis.

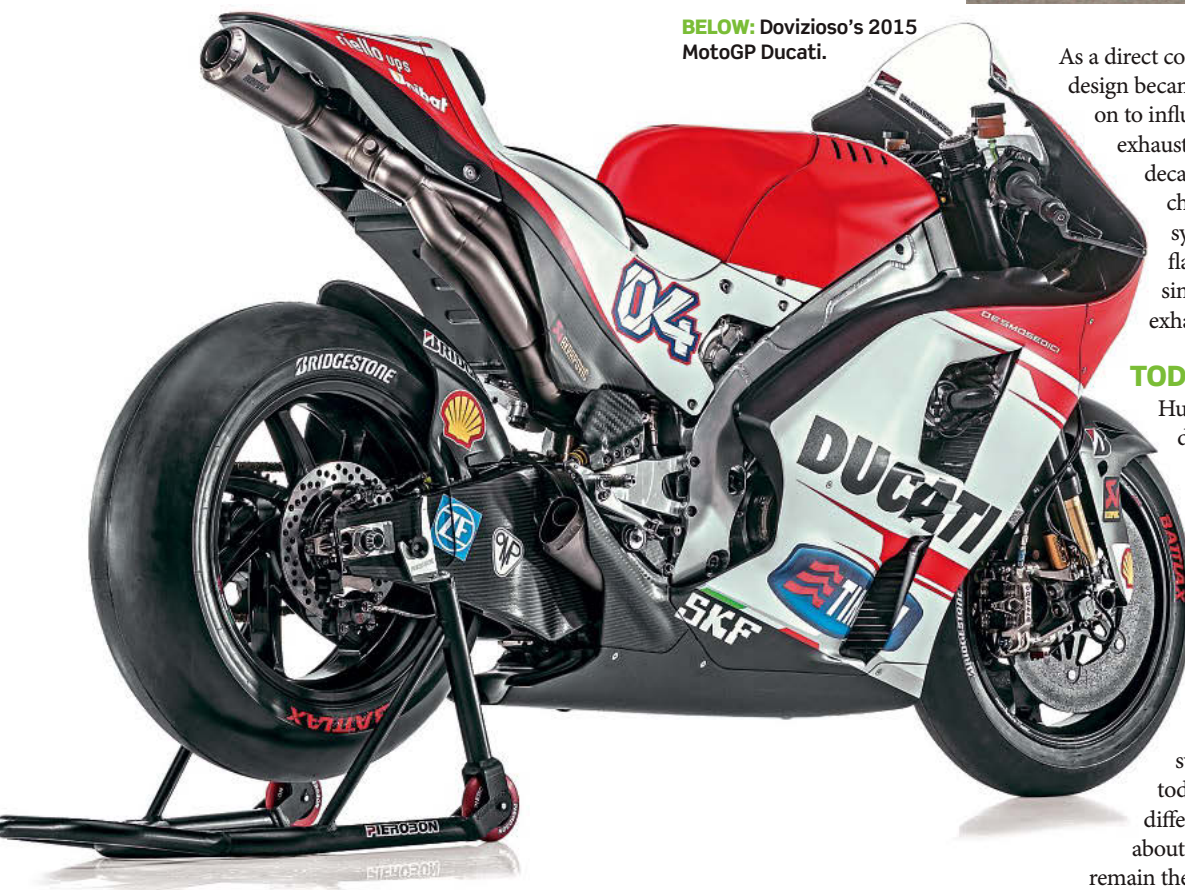


**ABOVE:** Mike Hailwood on Honda’s famous six-cylinder 350cc, at the 1967 Ulster GP, sporting evolved versions of the megaphone exhaust.



**RIGHT:** Albeit the internal design of the pipework was drastically different, the megaphone styling influenced the look of many future motorcycles’ exhausts, including the Benelli Sei.

**BELOW:** Dovizioso’s 2015 MotoGP Ducati.



As a direct consequence, the peashooter design became massively popular and went on to influence many manufacturers’ exhaust designs over the next few decades. Evolving as it went, another change made to the peashooter system was to extend the length of flare quite significantly, while simultaneously reducing the exhaust’s outlet diameter.

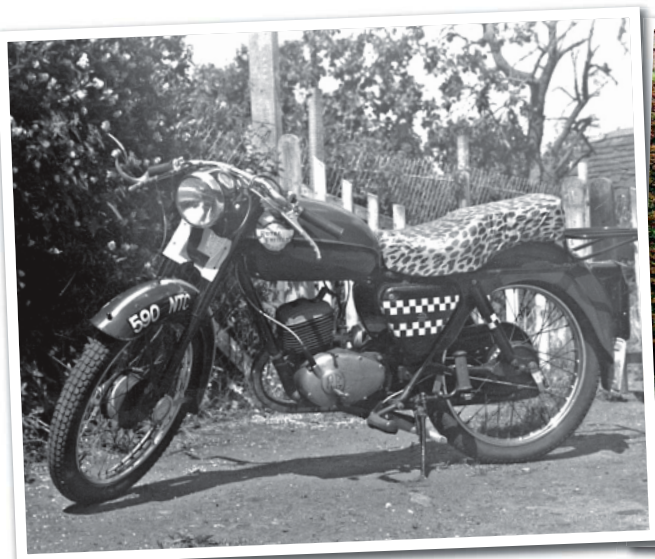
## TODAY’S DESIGNS

Huge advances in gas-flow diagnostics, plus the introduction of much stricter noise and emissions legislation, has seen a whole new orientation in exhaust profile and thinking. This being the case, the ‘mega’ exhaust still holds a firm place in the racing paddock, being the chosen sting-in-the-tail design on most Moto GP factory exhaust systems. Naturally, the design of today’s megaphones is significantly different to the likes of what came about in the 1930s, but the principals remain the same. History has a funny habit of repeating itself.



# Upside down bars and **LEOPARD-PRINT SEATS**

Bikes have come a long way since Roger's first machine, but he still holds dear some of his earlier ones...



Roger Jones has been riding for 53 years and is now retired and living in Lincolnshire...

## What was your first bike Roger?

"I was living in Claybrooke Magna, Leicestershire when I got my first bike – a 1958 Royal Enfield Prince 150cc two-stroke. It cost me £55 in 1962 with 'new' rear carrier, not forgetting of course the go-faster chequered tape, leopard-print seat cover and turned-upside-down standard handlebars. I used to get into trouble for taking it to school instead of using the bus, but I got round that by saying that if I couldn't go in the week on the bike, I wouldn't be able to get in on a Saturday morning to play for the school rugby team.

"I had it for eight months and used it for going to school (sixth year at Lutterworth Grammar School), and going to work at Sketchleys Dry Cleaners factory in Hinckley during the school holidays, to earn more money for the next planned bike. Looking back, the reliability was okay and being my first road bike it was exciting to say the least."

## What have you had since?

"I've had 52 bikes in all, mostly of the touring (not fully faired) or Adventure style. That includes several trail and trials bikes, but they have been mainly for use during the winter."

## What have you got now?

"Erm, well... a 2008 BMW R1200GS Adventure that I bought brand new – that's my main bike. A 1977 BMW R100RS that I bought from new too. A 1997 BMW F650ST that I've owned for two years. A 1990 Kawasaki 650KLR Tengai that I've had for four years. A 1991 Suzuki DR350S that I've had from new and a 1953 Matchless G3 Trials bike that I've owned for eight years. "I got the GS from Astles (now Marshalls), the BMW dealership in Laceby, near Grimsby for £10,500 – I mostly ride it for pleasure only, all over Great Britain and the West Coast of Ireland."

## Any problems?

"Not really – it's been very reliable, apart from three fuel sensor strips that have been fitted since new. The list of accessory strips is too long to mention, but the main options I've added are electronic suspension, luggage, sat-nav and a Remus exhaust."

## So you still love it?

"Compared to modern adventure bikes it may not have all the latest electronics, but I still think it rides like an absolute dream. Some people say it's a bit rough around the edges, but I like my motorcycles to be totally engaging; hence my line-up of either single or twin-cylinder bikes. I do my own servicing and the GS is a doddle to deal with."

From a 1958 Royal Enfield Prince, to this fleet!

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# Always changing

**Kevin Cameron**



**W**hen GP racing resumed post-war in 1949, the classes chosen were a reflection of what the public were buying. Now, Moto3 and Moto2 are rungs in a ladder leading to MotoGP, but in 1949 125, 250, and 350 were free-standing classes whose specialist riders did not necessarily aspire to ride 500s.

The manufacturers of 1949 raced designs related to their commercial products; early 125s were often DOHC race versions of SOHC or pushrod production bikes, and most two-stroke 125s were based on or inspired by DKW's Hermann Weber-designed RT125 (this includes Mondial, MV, Suzuki, IFA/MZ, Yamaha).

Britain's tradition of rugged racing singles in 350 and 500 also flowed from earlier production designs. Guzzi's five-year dominance of the 350 class in 1953-57 was implemented as highly refined variants of that maker's production horizontal singles, often with raceable privateer bikes offered at an intermediate performance level. Norton's "unapproachable" 500 racer existed as factory team bikes, always a year ahead of the privateer "Manx". In England, fuel cost and economic austerity saw to it that roughly four times as many 350s were sold as 500s.

The exceptions were Gilera's across-the-frame in-line fours (beginning in 1947 and roughly based on pre-war supercharged fours) and MV's very similar 500 and 350 fours (because they were designed for 1950 by Piero Remor, a former Gilera engineer). Such exotic developments were paid for from large-volume sales of small-bore commuter bikes and the beginnings of a lightweight sporting market.

Of the classic Italian makers, only Guzzi remains, producing elaborations of its heavy V-twin. Where did the others go? Like so many English and German makers, they were swept away when increasing numbers of former customers at last became prosperous enough to afford cars.

Vast commuter-bike sales in postwar Germany allowed NSU and a few others to put major R&D into reputation-enhancing GP bikes. These were naturally technology-based rather than evolutions of prewar models (Bismarck's system of higher technical universities at work), so NSU's Dr Walter Froede launched future racing four-strokes on a path of making power from ever-higher rpm. Only BMW survived the switch to cars. The rpm=power quest was continued first by Italy, then by Japan.

In the mid-1960s the FIM actually considered

## Cameron questions whether the current economy can support high-price bikes.

dropping the 500 class – Norton, AJS, Matchless and Velocette had just ceased production of the only bikes a privateer could afford, and the 1957 Italian pullout from GP racing left only MV able to win easily from privateer fields of discontinued singles. While the post-war boom could no longer fund GP racing, the large leisure motorcycle market had not yet established itself. In 1965 no one could even conceive of sales of \$22,000 Yamaha R1-M sportsbikes.

What kept GP racing alive was the coming of the Japanese giants – Honda, Yamaha, and Suzuki. They were eager to 'make their bones' in the world market through racing success. When that period came to an end in 1967 - '68, two-stroke production racers from Yamaha were ready to take the place of now-FIM-banned four, five, and six-cylinder 125, 250, and 350 four-stroke, and two-strokes with up to 18 speeds. The cost of the new privateer racers was kept low by basing them on production models such as Yamaha's RD250/350 or the production AS1-C. Factory racing was all but dead after 1968, with only MV in the field.

What had changed? Europe and Asia had finally completed their post-war revival, and many riders could now afford to run the new production racers.

As the leisure market for motorcycles expanded along with the world economy, a need arose to show that Japanese 'tiddler-makers' could build big, fast production bikes such as Honda's 1969 CB750 and Kawasaki's 1973 903-cc Z1. Yamaha and Suzuki took on MV in the 500 class beginning in 1974, importing new vitality to GP racing. MV departed in 1977 but Honda arrived with its four-stroke, oval piston NR500, followed in 1982 by its two-stroke NS3 Triple. MotoGP terminated the two-stroke GP era in 2002 and Ducati arrived in the new 990 class with a bang in 2003. The rest is recent memory.

Now the question. With the persistence of the depression that began in 2008-09, fewer people can afford *any* motorcycle, much less the recent one-litre sportsbikes, tourers, sport-tourers, adventure bikes and cruisers, each costing as much as a fairly nice car. This market for high-priced and very specialized bikes came into being since the 1980s but is now under threat and being greatly contracted. Will the high-priced market return? Can the makers cover overheads with sales of simple, low-cost commuter scooters and small-bore bikes in Asian markets? What form must the motorcycle assume next?

### Who is Cameron?

Kevin is one of the most widely-respected technical gurus on the planet. Author of some of the most iconic and landmark books in motorcycle publishing, the American brings the innermost workings of what goes on in an engine to the fore in an easy-to-access way. Simply put, Cameron is a genius of all things metal that are fixed to two wheels



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John McGuinness ready to launch his Fireblade off the start line in the Senior TT.

# The story behind the glory: **HONDA'S TT SUCCESS**



On June 12, 2015, Honda Racing's John McGuinness blitzed this Fireblade SP around the Isle of Man's TT course, storming to victory in the Senior race and setting the new outright lap record of 132.701mph. This is the story of how it was made possible...

WORDS: Bruce Wilson PHOTOGRAPHY: Joe Dick / Honda

**L**ined up on the grid, counting down the seconds to fire off down Bray Hill, it's easy to overlook the many months and many people it's taken to get to this point. The grafting, the planning, the moving, the budgeting... the whole other story that commenced almost a year earlier in a service station on the M62. There, sitting in his car and ready to talk business was Honda Racing's manager Neil Tuxworth – set to sort the following year's contract with long-term Honda racer and figurehead John McGuinness. John, however, was nowhere to be seen. "I got tired of waiting", explained Neil, "So I called him on his

phone and asked him where he was. He told me he was at Burton Wood services, so I reminded him we'd agreed to me at Burch services, some 20 miles away. 'Oh', he said, 'I knew it began with a B'. That's just typical of our John.

"Within 20 minutes he'd arrived, so we went inside and grabbed a coffee and bacon sarnie. I like to keep things simple, so I just had a small notepad with me and, like I've always done with him, asked what he was thinking with regards to riding for us in 2015. What he was happy with, what he wanted to change. Within the hour we'd agreed terms verbally and, as far as I was concerned, everything was set for the following season."





Returning to Honda Racing's headquarters in Louth, Lincolnshire, the next task for Neil was to get the official paperwork drawn up and arrange for the formal contracts to be signed. "We don't take it for granted that John will continue riding for Honda, but we hope he will. He's been a fantastic ambassador for Honda over the years", said Neil. "Getting that contract signed is the first step in the following year's event, which can only be done once Honda has confirmed its budgets – normally set towards the end of July following the Suzuka 8-Hour event.

"Like with signing a rider, I never assume that Honda will decide to compete at the TT. That's why it's so important to have the budget confirmed before I start wasting my time or anyone else's. The TT was the first place that Honda ever competed internationally, in 1959, so it's a very important event for Honda and its racing programme. Nothing's ever guaranteed in life, but the TT is a big part of the brand's heritage."

Neil went on to explain how the TT budget and costs to compete have pretty much remained stable over the past few years, owing to changes in bike specification legislation which have seen a reduction in the outlays of building a motorcycle, even if other expenses, such as accommodation, have risen. Unlike many other teams, Honda Racing is predominantly self-funded, with the core budget coming direct from Honda Motor Europe (HME).

"It's HME's responsibility to source new sponsorship. And while Honda would be happy to work with a major title sponsor, it will never undersell itself just to get a sponsor on-board. We'd sooner promote Honda on a Honda bike. This being the case, we do have two bigger subsidiary sponsors in Motul and Dunlop, who support us significantly, and we work very closely with both brands"



**TOP LEFT:** Carrying plenty of spares is essential.

**TOP RIGHT:** The purpose made workshop at Honda Racing HQ is where the TT and BSB bikes get serviced.

**ABOVE:** Neil Tuxworth, Honda's racing manager.

**BELOW LEFT:** When the rear wheel gets changed, the technicians lift the chain onto this tab on the swinging arm to keep it out of the way.

**BELOW RIGHT:** Honda Racing has its own dyno in Louth, where engines can be run-in and tested before use on track.

## PREPARING THE BIKE

With John committed and the cash needed in place, the next step for the team is to start looking at refreshing the motorcycles for the following season, once they've done the rounds at a few events and shows.

Places like Goodwood and Motorcycle Live provide the perfect platforms for fans to get within touching distance of the TT bikes, which is massively important to Honda. As Neil explained, Honda goes racing for three reasons; to test its products to the ultimate limit and assist with motorcycle development; to promote products with winning results and showcase the brand's potential; and to entertain the customers.

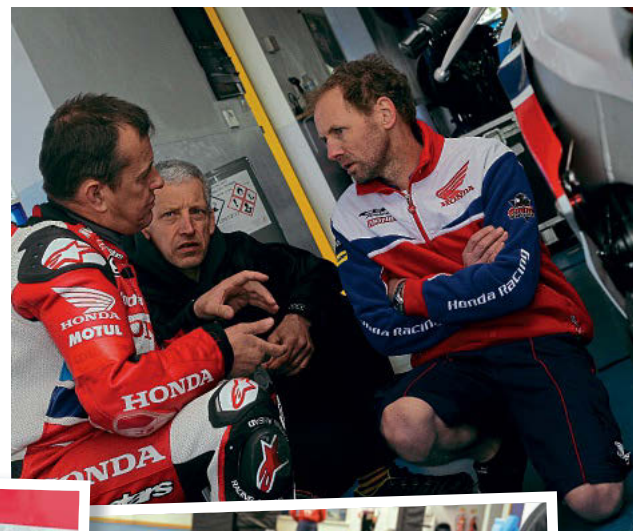
There is a massive following of the TT, and giving people the opportunity to get close to the bikes they see battling it out on the Island is hugely important, to the extent that it's worth compromising the arrival of the bikes with the team's technicians who are keen to start stripping them.

By the start of December, the racing machines will be available for the refresh, which takes part at the team's base in a custom-built workshop with its own bike and engine building rooms, dyno and CNC machine. Because the Hondas do such low mileages, there's little need to replace the entire motorcycle each season, so the Fireblade McGuinness won on in 2015 was actually already three years old by that point, as was his teammate Conor Cummins'.

Each year, the engines from both riders' machines will come out and be completely rebuilt, with new components such as pistons, con rods and bearings replaced. The K-Tech suspension is given an overhaul too, the gearboxes examined and it's also a prime time to inspect the entire bike for any fatigue. Because the machines take such a pounding around the Island,







Honda makes a lot of components – such as brackets, yokes and footpegs – much tougher and thicker than you'd normally expect on a racing motorcycle; the additional weight disadvantages being outweighed by the much-needed durability.

Items aren't replaced for the sake of replacing them, but if there's any doubt about their integrity, the three technicians who work full-time on the TT bikes don't leave anything to chance; new parts get bolted on. One of the hardest components to inspect is the wiring looms, which get changed each year for peace of mind.

The whole process, including the reworking of a spare engine for each bike, is typically completed towards the end of January in readiness for the first test of the season in February. Quite often, the spec of the build remains very similar to that of the season before, and with good reason – it works. One other interesting thing to note is the relatively low-tech of the Hondas, when compared to other teams' superbikes.

Neil told us: "I've been involved with the TT since 1971, first as a rider and then as a team manager. The main thing I've learned is that people always try to over-complicate things. You've got to keep things as simple as possible. At the end of the day it's a race over varying surfaces, on a road, through villages and over mountains, so it's very hard to make a motorcycle that's perfect for every inch of the track."

"A lot of teams go to the TT with all the latest gizmos and they just don't work there. We don't build the fastest bike by any means, but we build a bike that's well-rounded and set to perform on the Island. People often forget that a near road-going superstock bike will lap around one mile per hour slower than a superbike, which tells you a lot. You don't need loads of different traction control settings and bits like that; people often over complicate the situation."

## THE LOGISTICS

While Honda Racing focuses mainly on the track elements of competing, there's still the necessity of plane, ferry and accommodation bookings to be made, which is done from the Louth base, often a whole year ahead of time to ensure availability.

Simultaneously, Honda Motor Europe will set to arranging catering and corporate hospitality for the many international guests who will come to support the race team. Thankfully for Neil, his two crew chiefs and

**TOP LEFT:** The TT and World Endurance teams both share a race transporter.

**TOP RIGHT:** John talks to crew chief Julien Boland at the pre-TT Castle Combe test.

**ABOVE LEFT:** Thousands of spares are carried everywhere by the team in their lorry.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** It's not just the bikes that get a pre-season shakedown, John and Conor both went to the English Institute of Sport to evaluate and improve their fitness.

**BELOW:** Castle Combe is a popular venue for TT teams to test at before the main event.

the two other technicians that make up the Honda Racing team don't have to get involved in any part of this procedure, so they're free to concentrate on the job in hand; getting the bikes ready to race.

Each year in February, the team will head abroad for a couple of days' testing. In 2015, the venue was the Monte Blanco circuit in the south of Spain, with the sole intention of getting racers used to riding bikes again, and the supporting mechanics re-familiarised with their roles. It also gives the chance to iron out any pre-season niggles, and make changes if necessary. Not every rider has their bike the same, with Conor and John each having their own preferences of levers and the like, these being fitted before the real TT test starts in April at Castle Combe.

"We do a two day test at Castle Combe every year, which is booked the August before", said Neil. "It's the closest race track to the roads, because it's fast and bumpy. We often learn a lot about bike setup here, with the main goal being achieving good stability. It also provides more track time for our racers, and gives them the chance to get used to riding the bike at high speed."







**ABOVE LEFT:** John and Conor in action at the North West, gaining important track time ahead of the TT.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** The team's race awning is also their workshop for the TT fortnight.



"Bringing its tyres for the riders, Dunlop always joins us to help familiarise the team ahead of the real deal. You've got to go to the TT ready to race, and that's where we're always at. Before we arrived at the TT, John McGuinness turned to me following our two tests and said he was ready to take the bike out of the lorry and race it off down Bray Hill, with no qualms. You can't go to the TT and expect to do well if you haven't put the time into getting the bikes where they need to be in the first place."

### THE NORTH WEST

Post testing, the engines will be stripped again and refreshed ready for the start of the season, which typically commences at the North West 200 meeting in Northern Ireland. Before heading over, the final preparations for racing are undertaken with the bikes being carefully checked over and the team's truck being loaded meticulously with sufficient spares to ensure the crew has everything it needs.



**RIGHT:** John in action on the Fireblade over Ballaugh Bridge heading for his 23rd career win.

The lorry, which is driven by two of the team's technicians, can then begin its journey to the Island, being ferried into Douglas, before heading over to the paddock below the TT grandstand. The event organisers have predetermined positions in place for each team's vehicles, which then have to be expanded out with workshop awnings, and floored by a third party company.

With the whole team, riders and mechanics, reunited on the Island, everything is in place for practice week to get under way, which focuses on dialling the bikes in to suit the Island circuit; the track's surface being susceptible to changes in condition from the year before. Because nothing's been left to chance, very little alterations are often needed to be made, with each member left to concentrate on their core roles. "If we need to have a meeting, we'll call one, but it's not very often that we do," said Neil.

"In 2015, we were made to use new fuel filling systems, and we

## Julien Boland, Honda racing chief technician



**Job role:** To liaise directly with the rider and manage a team of mechanics.

An old hand in the race scene, Julien is one of Honda Racing's two crew chiefs. This means he's the man responsible for interpreting and directing the bike off the back of rider and data feedback, while also

ensuring the machine is built and prepared to the highest of standards. The TT superbikes are actually three years old, but a lot of components are changed annually, as Julien told us.

"The superbikes do around 2000 race kilometres a year, which is nothing by a race bike's standards. To put things in perspective, we do nearly double that distance in one race of the 24-hour World Endurance Championships. This being the case, we still build two brand-new engines for the bikes each season, quite often of a similar specification to the motors that have come before them.

"We've been working with the current version of the Honda Fireblade for seven years now, which means that we understand it very well. We know what works, and what doesn't.

The way in which we tune the bikes has varied over the years, owing to both changes in technical legislation, but also from learning first-hand what works and what doesn't. Our engines used to be much more similar in build to the tuning we apply to our BSB superbikes, but we've gone in a different direction these last few years. It's really important to have a nice, smooth power curve for the TT, rather than a peaky motor with ridiculous power in all the wrong places.

"We start stripping the bikes down and commencing the engine refreshes just before Christmas, once they've finished doing the rounds at all the big bike shows, such as Goodwood and Motorcycle Live. Everything comes apart, from the suspension to the motors, and

we change whatever we need to in order to have the bikes as strong and reliable as possible.

"The TT is a very gruelling environment, so components are much more susceptible to fatigue than they would be on a normal race track, or when being ridden on the road. For this reason, it makes good sense for us to change things before they become a problem... obviously, we have a budget to work to, so things aren't just changed for the sake of changing them.

"The four engines we build could be turned around within three days, assuming all the parts are with us, but we actually aim to have the motors built and the bike reassembled by the end of January, ready for the season's first test. That gives us plenty of time to get on top of everything."



## Graeme Parker, Honda Racing mechanic



**Job role:** To help build and prepare the bikes for the TT.

Like most of the team at Honda, Graeme is an old hand when it comes to TT duties, having first gone over to work at the international race meeting in 1999. On top of his many jobs – which also include driving the team's lorry over to the Island – it's Graeme's responsibility to change the rear wheel on the superbikes when they come into pit, as he explained.

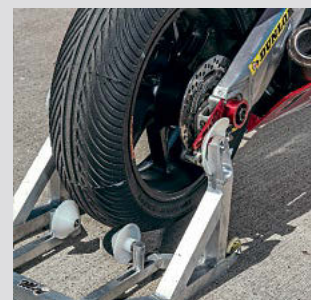
"It's quite a systematic process, and the key is to stay calm and concentrate purely on what you're doing. Some riders will be egging you on to speed the process up, but it only ever takes 20 seconds to complete a wheel change, while the refuelling can be over double that time – there's no need to

rush. If you let your guard down it's easy to make mistakes, as I've seen on quite a few occasions. People are susceptible to dropping components, or cross-threading the axle. It doesn't end well.

"The Honda Racing superbikes use a bespoke swinging arm, on which we've attached specific lugs to help speed up the wheel changing process. The wheel nut is captive, so you just buzz the spindle out to free the wheel. The chain is lifted off the sprocket and retained out of the way on a special lug, so that you can just roll the wheel straight out.

"The paddock stand has nylon bobbins to help guide the new wheel into place, with the rear disc slotting nicely between the

fixed rear caliper, on which the pads are held open by magnets, so there's no faffing. The chain goes back on and the spindle is slotted into place, before the whole thing is tightened up. Having taken the bike off the stand, the last thing I do is to click the gearbox into first, so the rider will just get on and go."



Graeme's in charge of this end.

had a bit of a problem with John's in the opening superbike race, which cost him 20 seconds and a shot at the podium. After the race, we evaluated the system and improved it as best we could to make sure we weren't penalised again."

As is the theme with Honda Racing, preparation seems to be the key to its success, and that's also the reason for flying over the team's engine builder at the start of race week to come and strip, check and change any fatigued parts in the superbike engines ahead of the Senior TT at the end of the week.

That extra degree of effort paid off spectacularly for Honda when John rounded off a fantastic TT week by achieving his spectacular, record-breaking win in the Senior. A moment that could never have been achieved without all the hard work of all the employees at Honda Racing, both at home in Louth or trackside at the TT. Goal achieved, attention turns almost immediately to next year's TT, and so the process begins again.



Heading down the winner's enclosure with James Hillier and Michael Dunlop in tow.

## Honda's TT success



Since its earliest days, Honda has placed huge importance on competing at the TT, achieving some magnificent results. Here's a list of wins under Neil's tenure...

### SENIOR

2006 John McGuinness  
2007 John McGuinness  
2008 John McGuinness  
2009 Steve Plater  
2010 Ian Hutchinson  
2011 John McGuinness  
2013 John McGuinness  
2015 John McGuinness

### SUPERBIKE

2006 John McGuinness  
2007 John McGuinness  
2009 John McGuinness  
2010 Ian Hutchinson  
2011 John McGuinness  
2012 John McGuinness  
2013 Michael Dunlop  
2015 Bruce Anstey

### PRODUCTION

1996 Phillip McCallen  
1997 Phillip McCallen  
1998 Jim Moodie

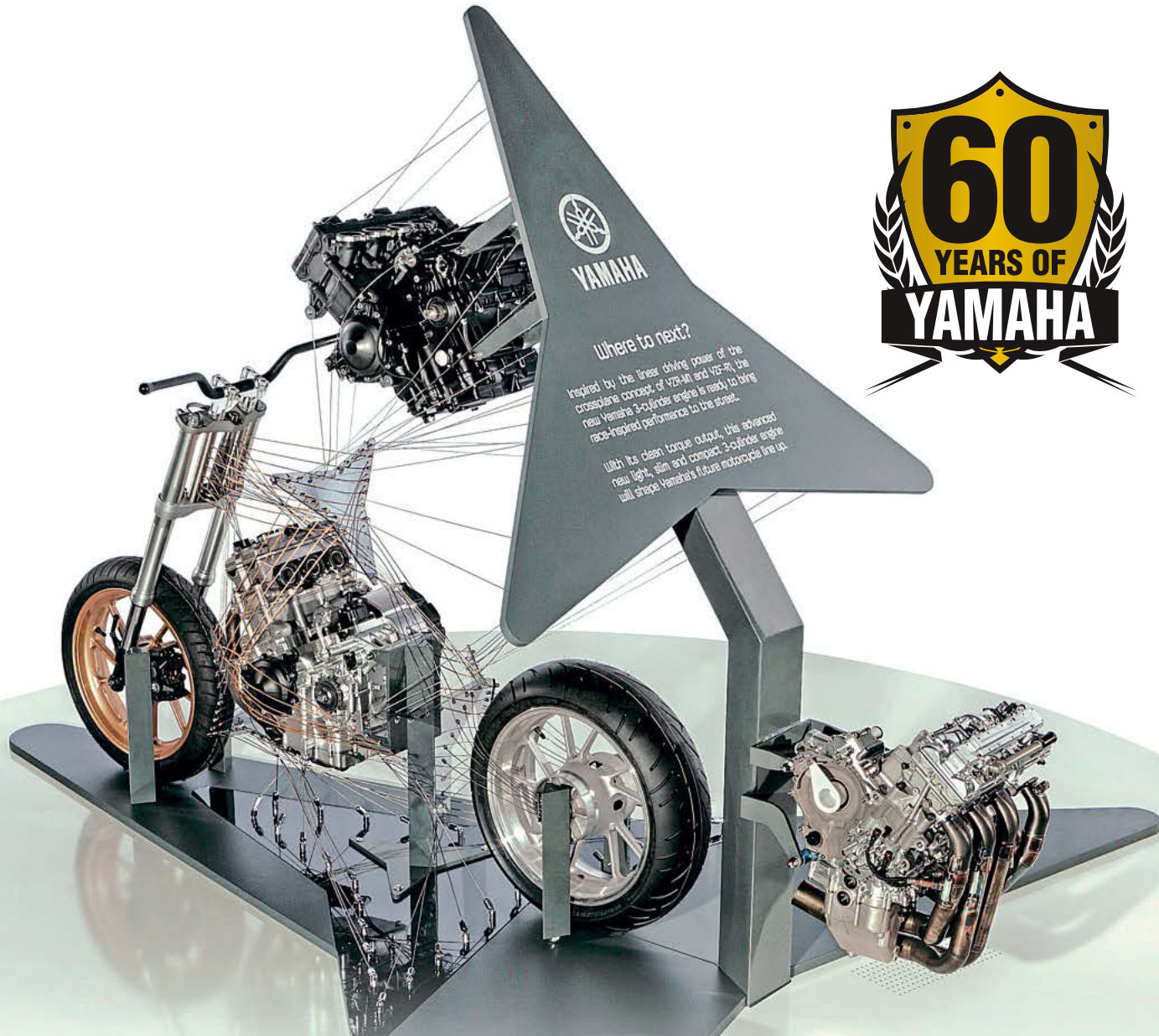
### SUPERSTOCK

2009 Ian Hutchinson  
2010 Ian Hutchinson  
2012 John McGuinness  
2013 Michael Dunlop

### SUPERSPORT 600CC

1989 Steve Hislop  
1991 Steve Hislop  
1992 Phillip McCallen  
1993 Jim Moodie  
1995 Iain Duffus  
1996 Phillip McCallen  
1997 Ian Simpson  
1998 Michael Rutter  
1999 Jim Moodie  
2005 Ian Lougher  
2006 John McGuinness  
2007 Ian Hutchinson  
2009 Ian Hutchinson  
2010 Ian Hutchinson x2  
2011 Bruce Anstey  
2011 Gary Johnson  
2012 Bruce Anstey  
2013 Michael Dunlop x2  
2014 Michael Dunlop





# What did Yamaha ever do for us?

As the iconic Japanese manufacturer celebrates its 60th year, we look at the highs and lows that made it one of the most exciting bike brands in the world.

WORDS: Roland Brown

**Y**amaha's highlights stretch back six decades and include spectacular new models plus countless race and championship victories. But one of the biggest of all happened less than three years ago and involved a curious concept creation made from metal wires and a three-cylinder engine.

It was early October 2012 and there was a press day at the Intermot show in Cologne. With Yamaha still reeling

from the damage of the global recession, few journalists who gathered for the firm's press conference expected much from an ailing firm that hadn't launched a notable bike for ages.

We didn't get one that day either, but interest was stirred when Kunihiro Miwa, familiar as the engineer behind the original YZF-R1 and R6 in the late Nineties, stepped up to unveil the concept – more of a sculpture than a bike – and admit that “some people think we're not building as many exciting models as we used to” before promising that “something special” was on the way.

**ABOVE:** This wire sculpture was the first hint at the MT series that's become such a massive success.





Miwa was followed by Yamaha Europe high-up Andrew Smith, who confirmed it would be “only a little bit more time” before the firm could match its fighting talk with new machinery. “Imagine what bikes we can use this three-cylinder engine for,” Smith said. “Yamaha’s future and commitment to the motorcycle industry starts again.”

Something was clearly stirring, as Smith echoed the speech with which Kawasaki’s president had relaunched his own firm 10 years earlier. And whatever new Yamahas we imagined, they probably weren’t as good as the ones that the company has succeeding in delivering since then. Almost three years on, the impressively rejuvenated firm is celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary with exciting models riding high in the sales charts and with its riders Valentino Rossi and Jorge Lorenzo dominating the MotoGP championship. It’s difficult to equate the current, thriving company with the one that was so recently in deep depression.



**ABOVE LEFT:** Genichi Kawakami decided to use Yamaha’s tooling to produce motorcycles instead of sewing machines.

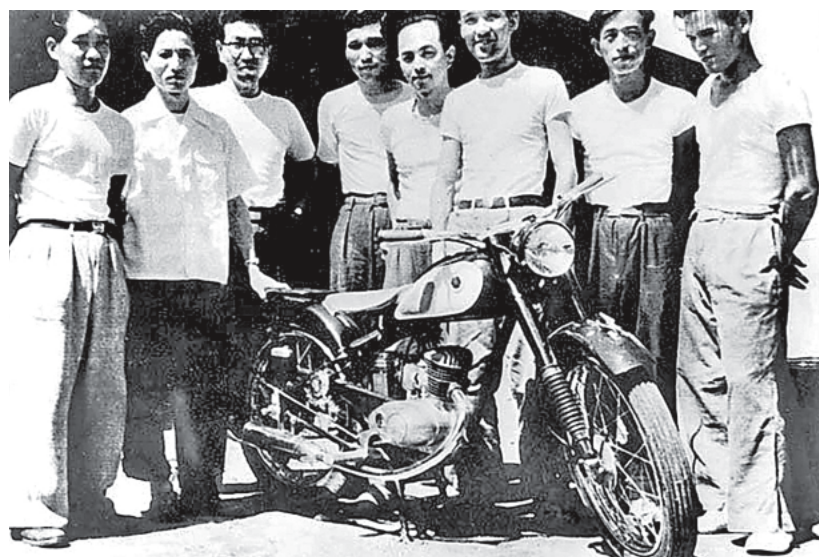
**ABOVE:** An early Yamaha twin.

**RIGHT:** The 5.6bhp YA-1 was Yamaha’s first machine.



**LEFT:** Andrew Smith declared Yamaha was back.

**BELOW:** The Red Dragonfly with its development team in the 1950s.



Then again, that recent dark period following the credit crunch was not the only time in those 60 years that Yamaha had been on the ropes. The motorcycle industry can be very volatile and Yamaha, as the only one of the Japanese giants for whom bikes are the major product, is perhaps more vulnerable than the rest. But that unique focus on motorcycles, and the commitment it brings, has led to some amazing machines and achievements over these last 60 years.

## THE RED DRAGONFLY

One theme running through Yamaha for much of its time is original thinking, but that’s not how the company began back in 1955. Its first bike, the YA-1, was – like BSA’s Bantam, Harley-Davidson’s Hummer and the Soviet Moskva – basically a copy of German firm DKW’s RT125. The firm had considered producing sewing machines before president Genichi Kawakami had decided to use the machine tools, which had produced aircraft propellers during the Second World War, to manufacture motorcycles.

Yamaha was already well-known in Japan because it was the brand name of the Nippon Gakki Co, a leading manufacturer of musical instruments – hence the famous tuning fork logo. The name came from Torakusu Yamaha, the firm’s founder and first president, who had begun manufacturing organs in the late 1880s. Kawakami set up the Yamaha Motor Co on July 1, 1955. Soon afterwards the firm’s Hamamatsu factory began production of the YA-1, which became known as the Red Dragonfly due to its maroon and white paintwork.





The little two-stroke single produced a claimed 5.6bhp and had a top speed of 50mph. It quickly made an impression and began Yamaha's racing story in impressive fashion, when the firm entered Japan's two major race meetings at Fuji and Asama and won both. The firm's reputation was boosted further by its first twin-cylinder model, the 250cc YD-1. The 14.5bhp twin was also inspired by a German two-stroke, the Adler MB250, but incorporated numerous differences.

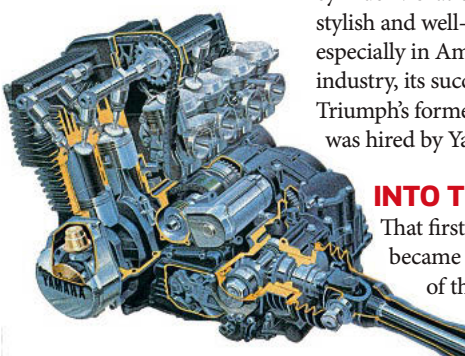
It was the YD's sportier successors – the YDS models – that did the most to establish Yamaha. The initial YDS-1, with its five-speed gearbox, twin carbs and slimmer styling, was a hit on road and track in Japan following its launch in 1959. The follow-up YDS-2, which incorporated a twin-leading-shoe front brake and numerous other improvements, transferred some of that success to export markets including Britain when it arrived in the early Sixties.

By this time Yamaha had grown rapidly, surviving an early financial crisis (caused by disappointing sales of scooters and mopeds) to establish itself as the second largest Japanese firm behind Honda. Two rivals had also been swallowed up. One was Showa, itself once Japan's number two, whose advanced two-strokes had featured reed-valve induction, Earles forks, tubeless tyres and even push-button gear-changing. Showa had itself recently taken over Hosk, which had specialised in copying British parallel twins, to which it had often added overhead-cam valve operation.



**ABOVE:** The RD400C improved on the RD350 (see page 112).

**ABOVE LEFT:** The YDS-2 bought Yamaha to Britain.



**ABOVE:** The XS1100's motor made record-breaking power, but the bike was too heavy.

**BELOW:** The 'Fizzie' bought bikes to a new generation.



The Hosk connection paved the way for Yamaha's entry into the four-stroke market in 1969, with the 650cc parallel twin XS-1. The sohc engine produced a respectable 53bhp, enough to give the XS-1 a top speed of just over 100mph. It suffered from typical twin-cylinder vibration, and weaved at high speed, but was stylish and well-priced enough to become a success, especially in America. Ironically for the fading British industry, its successors were improved by the efforts of Triumph's former engineer and test rider Percy Tait, who was hired by Yamaha to assist with development.

## INTO THE SEVENTIES

That first twin's XS-2 and XS650 successors became some of the most popular Japanese bikes of the Seventies in the States, especially when Yamaha catered for the growing "factory custom" market with models such as the XS650 Special, with its high bars, black paintwork, stubby silencers and fat rear tyre. Meanwhile, in Europe and elsewhere it was the contrastingly racy two-strokes that were leading the way, notably the 250cc YDS range and the more powerful and quicker 350cc models, of which the 1970-model YR5 was the first significant export success.

Those middleweight strokers were superb little machines, offering high-revving thrills and race-related charisma at a competitive price. Arguably the best of all of them was the first RD350 of 1973, complete with reed-valve induction system, six-speed gearbox, disc front brake and ton-up top speed. Three years later came the RD400C with its angular styling, improved handling and 40bhp, 398cc air-cooled engine. There were smaller 200cc, 175cc and 125cc variants, too. In 1976 a new generation of motorcyclists (this one included) was experiencing Yamaha two-stroke thrills aboard the famous 'Fizzie' – the 49cc FS1-E sports moped that had entered production as the FS-1 at the start of the decade.

Yamaha had also established a strong reputation for off-road and dual-purpose bikes, both in motocross racing and with production models. Swedish star Hakan Andersson's 250cc world title in 1973 was followed a year later by the production YZ250 motocrosser, also fitted with innovative single-shock Monocross rear suspension. Trail bikes such as the DT125 and DT175





**ABOVE:** The XS650 was one of Yamaha's 'factory custom' machines.

**RIGHT:** The XS750 lacked the performance of Suzuki's GS750.

**BELOW:** The 1970 YR5 was the first big export success.



became popular and were also given Monocross rear ends. Most-loved of all in many countries was the 1976-model XT500, which became a cult model and established the dual-purpose four-stroke single format that continues with the current XT660s.

But Yamaha's attempts to build a big four-stroke were strangely unsuccessful given the firm's competition background and expertise with smaller machines. The XS750 triple, launched in 1977, looked like a winner. Its 747cc dohc motor produced 64bhp, which was good for a top speed of 120mph and had the advantage of shaft drive. The XS was stylish, distinctive and handled well. But it lacked the performance of Suzuki's GS750 four, that was launched at the same time. It suffered a string of mechanical problems that damaged public confidence so severely that the more reliable XS850 that followed it could not restore its reputation.

There were no mechanical disasters with the XS1100, that was launched a year later, but the shaft-drive four was too huge and heavy to be competitive against the likes of Kawasaki's Z1000 and Suzuki's GS1000. Its dohc motor produced 95bhp, a record for a production four. But the 'Excess Eleven' had curiously square styling and weighed a massive 273kg. It had some success in the States as a tourer and remarkably even won the prestigious Castrol Six-Hour race in Australia, but was largely ignored elsewhere.

## Shun Miyazawa, Yamaha Europe product planner

"We [once] thought that if we made a better product and an extremely fast motorcycle, that's all that customers need. But today the market is driven not only by product and innovation, but by social engagement. People want to ride together and have a custom bike experience together, so we're trying to generate the infrastructure for customers to enjoy the bikes.

"When the crisis happened the market quickly became 50% of what it had been and we said 'Okay, we have to be very careful about how to use our precious engineers and development resources'. This meant we had an

approach of risk avoidance. We had to follow the market and we didn't have enough weapons, so the weapons had to be mainstream. We followed the market benchmarks, the [Kawasaki] Z750 with the FZ8 and the [BMW] R1200GS with the Super Ténéré. Our bikes were good but they weren't great because there was no emotional reason why someone should buy them. So when we were in the recovery period we said to ourselves, 'Let's have our own attitude, never following someone else but trying to do our own thing.' That's how the MT models came about.





## A RUSH TO FAILURE

Yamaha's disappointment in the superbike market didn't prevent the firm from over-reaching with disastrous results in the early Eighties when it attempted to take on Honda to become the world's biggest motorcycle manufacturer and started what became known as the 'war' between the Japanese giants.

Production was hugely increased, a plethora of new models included some that were distinctly under-developed (the XZ550 V-twin being among the most notorious) and Yamaha's strategy was revealed as highly risky when the previously thriving motorcycle market took a dramatic downturn.

"Yamaha wanted to become number one in the world for two-wheelers," recalls Andrew Smith, now the director of Yamaha Europe's Southern division and then at Yamaha UK. "The Western markets were growing by 10 or 20% annually and the Japanese domestic market was growing. Everything looked rosy and then it just stopped, almost overnight. We were unable to shut off the volumes and then had lots of products already in production or on their way in ships or in warehouses. It was disastrous for both of us [Honda and Yamaha] but even more painfully hard for Yamaha because bikes were our sole product. I don't know if it would ever have reached the final stage of going under but it was certainly very close."

What made the situation particularly damaging was that for a while neither firm was willing to reduce production for fear of losing their market share, so financial losses escalated. The 'war' was only ended after a meeting in 1982 between Yamaha and Honda bosses on the neutral ground of Kawasaki's factory in Akashi. Details have never been made public, but essentially both firms pledged to return to a sensible rate of new model development and Yamaha accepted that Honda would remain number one.

Yamaha eventually recovered and continued to expand, establishing factories in many countries and taking over French scooter firm MBK, as well as developing links with car giant Toyota and producing products including Formula One race engines, electric bicycles and watercraft.

The firm's stars of the early Eighties were once again fast and furious two-strokes. Arguably the best of all were the RD350LC and its smaller sibling the RD250LC, which arrived in 1980, adding liquid-cooling and monoshock rear ends to the hugely successful format of the Race Developed RD-series twins.

The LCs' screaming performance and reasonable price generated a cult following and the 350's spectacular Pro-Am one-make race series reinforced Yamaha's



**ABOVE:** The FZR1000R put Yamaha at the top.

**BELOW:** The RD350LC was arguably Yamaha's best two-stroke.

The war ended after a meeting between Yamaha and Honda bosses on the neutral ground of Kawasaki's factory



Father to the XJR and FJR, the FJ was a "high-performance sports machine".



reputation for speed and excitement. Yamaha raised the two-stroke bar in 1984 with the stunning RD500LC, a 130mph-plus liquid-cooled V4 that was a replica of the works machine being ridden to that season's 500cc world title by Eddie Lawson. It made plenty of headlines but, like the firm's XJ650 Turbo, it was too expensive and impractical to sell in big numbers.

Yamaha still struggled to produce the class-leading superbike it so desired and this was no longer due to lack of effort or engineering ability. The marque's other hot new bike for 1984 was the FJ1100. Its 125bhp air-cooled four-cylinder engine, steel perimeter frame and half-faired styling combined to create what Yamaha called an "out-and-out high-performance sports machine". The fast and capable FJ was eclipsed by Kawasaki's racier GPZ900R, but found its niche as a



sports-tourer, sold well in FJ1200 form well into the Nineties and led to the XJR naked fours, as well as the FJR1300 sports-tourer.

A more surprising mid-Eighties hit was the V-Max, with its brutal naked styling and awesome 143bhp V4 engine. Initially launched only in the US, it became popular elsewhere (despite power being restricted in many markets) and was still being built with relatively minor changes two decades later. But Yamaha suffered disappointment in 1985 when the excellent FZ750, with its innovative 20-valve liquid-cooled engine, was put in the shade by Suzuki's racier GSX-R750.

The FZ was never the sales success its performance and engineering deserved, but it led in 1987 to the model that finally put Yamaha on top of the world, the FZR1000R. With its 989cc, 20-valve liquid-cooled engine wrapped in a twin-spar aluminium 'Deltabox' frame based on that of Yamaha's Genesis factory racer, the FZR was a fast and sharp-handling machine on which the marque's subsequent super-sports success was based, although the five-valves-per-cylinder layout was later dropped.



The V4 RD500LC was too expensive and impractical for big sales.

## Red Dragonfly to Rossi - 60 years of Yamaha Racing

With Valentino Rossi and Jorge Lorenzo threatening to make the current MotoGP season a two-horse race, Yamaha is on course to celebrate its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary with another championship win.

Yamaha has a proud racing record that stretches back through every one of those 60 years to the firm's debut model, the YA-1 Red Dragonfly that won its first two races in 1955.

The firm then beat Honda and the rest in prestigious 125 and 250cc events in Japan in the mid-Fifties. But by 1959 Honda had begun competing with dedicated racing machines, rather than production-based models and took revenge in domestic races before heading off to conquer the Grand Prix circuits in the early Sixties.

Yamaha could not afford a Grand Prix campaign and continued to build production-based racers, notably the TZ250 and 350 twins during the Seventies. But the firm did make a less high-profile attack on Grand Prix in the mid-Sixties with two-stroke twins. It was rewarded when Britain's Phil Read won the factory's first world title in the 250cc class in 1964, beating Honda's Jim Redman in the process.

Read retained the title in 1965 and went on to win two more 250cc crowns for Yamaha. His team-mate Bill Ivy won the 125cc title in 1967 but was runner-up in the 250cc class a year later after Read, who had already won the 125cc championship, defied team orders to finish second. Yamaha started the Seventies by winning championships with its 250 and 350cc twins, riders including Rod Gould, Finnish star Jarno Saarinen, and Venezuela's Dieter Braun and Venezuelan Johnny Cecotto.

Saarinen was leading the world championship on Yamaha's straight-



Rossi made the M1 a winner.

four OW19 when he was killed at Monza in 1973. Instead, Giacomo Agostini captured the biggest prize of all for Yamaha two years later, when he won Japan's first 500cc world championship.

Yamaha's Grand Prix glory continued with three Americans – Kenny Roberts, Eddie Lawson and Wayne Rainey. Former US Grand National Champion Roberts arrived in Europe in 1978 with one straight-four works OW38 and won the 500cc title, following it with two more championships. Lawson, too, won three championships for Yamaha. In the early 90s, Wayne Rainey took over the premier class with three titles before the Misano crash that ended his career.

In 2009 Ben Spies ended Yamaha's long quest for the World Superbike championship, in which riders including Fabrizio Pirovano and Noriyuki Haga had come agonisingly close. World Supersport has been a more successful battleground, with British riders Cal Crutchlow, Chaz Davies and Sam Lowes each winning a world title in the last six seasons. And although Yamaha has had some problems in getting the new R1 up to speed, Josh Brookes is already a podium regular in BSB and the firm will be back with a full-blown World Superbike challenge next season.

The firm has had a spectacular last decade in MotoGP, inspired by Valentino Rossi, who was lured from Honda in 2004 and turned the four-cylinder YZR-M1 from no-hoper (just one podium finish in 2003) to championship winner. Rossi won three of the next four titles before departing for Ducati, then returned to ride alongside Jorge Lorenzo, who promptly won a second championship of his own. This season is likely to end with one of them winning Yamaha's fifth title in eight years.



Giacomo Agostini's YZR500 OW20.





## RISE AND FALL

The Nineties was a generally strong decade for Yamaha, although the firm suffered like all the rest in the sales slump in the middle of it. The big FZR was repeatedly and successfully upgraded and joined in the range by some excellent smaller-capacity fours including the FZR600R.

Then in 1998 came arguably the firm's finest and most important superbike – the YZF-R1. Launched to great acclaim with its fine blend of 150bhp 20-valve engine, ultra-light chassis and razor-sharp styling, the R1 blitzed all opposition on road and track and began the R-series dynasty that has been so impressively extended this year.

That first R1 was joined in 1999 by 600cc YZF-R6, which made a rev-happy 120bhp and set the middleweight super-sports class into a fresh frenzy of high horsepower, light weight and fierce competition. The limited-edition YZF-R7 a year later was a fearsome piece of track-ready machinery, even though it made only 100bhp before its race-kit was fitted and failed to deliver Yamaha's goal of a first World Superbike title.

Another Nineties model whose impact outweighed its showroom performance was the 1996-model Royal Star

**ABOVE:** Yamaha created Star motorcycles in the US as an equivalent to Toyota's Lexus brand.

**RIGHT:** 150bhp and an ultra-light chassis made the R1 a huge success.



**BELOW:** The financial crisis made bikes like the MT-01 too expensive.

Venture, a 1294cc cruiser, built for the American market around a V4 engine derived from the V-Max. Yamaha had decided that what it needed for the cruiser-dominated US market was a distinct, upmarket brand, along the lines of Toyota's hugely successful Lexus division. The Royal Star failed to shine but Star motorcycles has thrived as Yamaha's cruiser arm in the States, where the current XV950 is sold as the Star Bolt.

Yamaha began the new millennium with a contrasting trio of 2001 models. The TMAX scooter's blend of 500cc twin-cylinder engine and light chassis made it a huge hit. The FZS1000 Fazer joined the smaller FZS600 in delivering four-cylinder performance and value for money. And the FJR1300 continued the FJ legacy by taking Yamaha's sports-touring four to a new level.

But there were few outstanding bikes in the next few years and Yamaha seemed to have lost its way even before the 2007 global financial crisis rocked the company. Flagship models including the MT-01, a quirky 1670cc V-twin and the long-awaited 197bhp VMAX were too expensive to sell in worthwhile numbers. Too many other models were simply ordinary. Yamaha had lost its old ability to build exciting bikes that were also good value and the credit crunch with its resultant huge fall in global sales left the firm in serious trouble. New model development was halted, resulting



## Phil Read, Yamaha's first world champion

"It started with a telegram from Japan, asking me to ride in the 1963 Japanese Grand Prix at Suzuka. I was leading the race on the last lap when the bike went onto one cylinder so I finished third, behind Jim Redman who won the championship [for Honda]. For the next season they gave me full factory support for five races, but for the other six they just provided the bikes and spares, plus £5000 and for that I had to provide the transport.

"That first championship all came down to the Italian round at Monza. That was a big moment but Yamaha didn't really get behind it in those days. They only sent one mechanic, who I had to meet at the airport then find him a hotel and so on. They didn't realise how important it was.

"I was very concerned when I arrived at Monza because there was this incredible sound, which was the Honda 250-six. I thought I'd lost because it was so fast, but I did manage to beat Redman and win the championship. Then I went back to the hotel and had a bath. There were no press interviews and no TV in those days.

"Yamaha didn't show much emotion

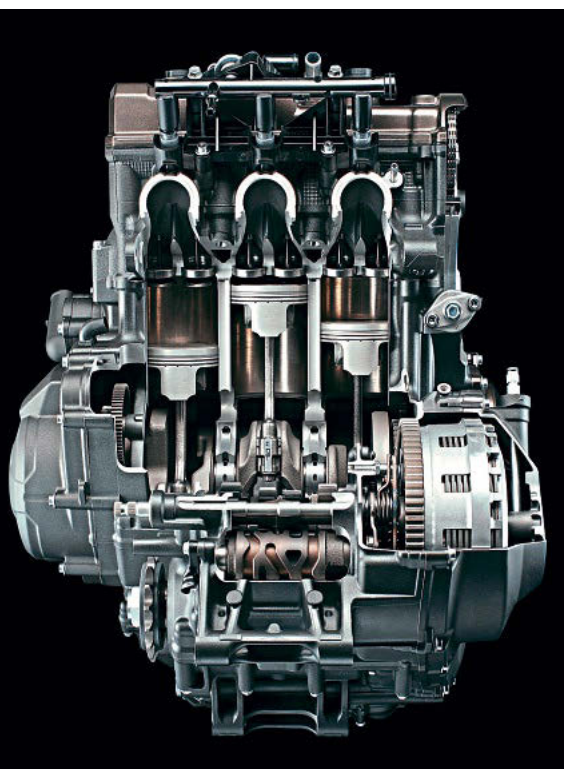


but they gave me 50% more the following season. And when I went to Japan for the last grand prix at Suzuka they gave the factory a holiday and hired the town hall in Hamamatsu. We had a sort of celebration and they loaned me five geisha girls.

"The Yamahas were really fast, although the next year Honda got the six running really well, but Redman crashed halfway through the season and I won another championship. Then in 1968 I won the 125 championship and the 250 again. That was when Yamaha told me to let [team-mate] Bill Ivy win the 250, but without any consultation with me so I was very upset and said he'd have to race for it. They thought he was terrific and he was, but I beat him."

**ABOVE LEFT:** The MT-09 engine was Yamaha's promised return.

**BELOW:** Rumours persist that the Tesseract could form part of an electric future.



in an ageing range, and Yamaha was also hit by currency issues related to the yen that made its bikes expensive.

"I think the last crisis was at least equal to the first one," says Smith. "It has probably made most companies rethink how they operate, and us in particular. We've made some very drastic changes. We were making products that we thought customers should buy because it was a Yamaha with a tuning fork on the tank, so they would buy with whatever the spec and the price. We realised we had to go back to putting the customer at the centre of everything we do and say and make."

### A RETURN TO FORM

To outsiders Yamaha's revival began with Smith and Miwa's fighting talk and the prototype three-cylinder engine at Cologne in 2012, but by that time the comeback was very much under way.

"We had the phrase, 'When is the time we are confident enough with the products we know we have coming to stand up and, rather than say sorry about the past, just say that Yamaha is now back?'" Smith says. "We had to convince our own staff, we had to convince our dealers and get them motivated and we had to demonstrate to the customers that we could once again make products they wanted to buy at the right price."

The first evidence of this arrived in 2013 with two contrasting lines that highlight Yamaha's revitalised approach. First was the XV950, a simple air-cooled cruiser that highlighted the Sport Heritage family with which Yamaha is attempting to connect with both its own history and with customers who are looking to do more than simply buy a bike. But Yamaha's most significant bike of recent years must be the MT-09 with which Yamaha delivered on the promises of those Internot speeches. With its punchy 847cc engine, light weight, lean style and fiery character, the 113bhp naked triple was good enough to be a hit, even before Yamaha gave it a surprisingly low price.

Its strong sales were eclipsed last year by the even more successful MT-07, whose blend of 689cc parallel twin engine, agility and value triggered comparisons

with Yamaha's great two-stroke twins of the Seventies and Eighties. Other models including this year's outstanding YZF-R3, MT-09 Tracer and revamped R1 have followed to keep the ball rolling. And it seems Yamaha aims to regain its reputation for innovative bikes. Last year's 125cc Tricity three-wheeled scooter was followed by the unveiling of a dramatically styled and much larger prototype, the TMAX-engined GEN01.

There's even a rumour that the four-wheeled leaning Tesseract, a high-profile Tokyo show concept almost a decade ago, might be in the pipeline, along with (or even part of) a new family of electric machines. It's a reflection on Yamaha's turnaround in the last three years that if the firm does unveil some spectacular bikes in the coming months, nobody will be remotely surprised.



# HIPSTERS OR HEROES?

The new-wave custom bike scene divides opinion in the classic and modern motorcycle world. John Milbank spent a few days with the builders and customers to find out why it matters...

WORDS: John Milbank PHOTOGRAPHY: Sebas Romero, John Milbank & Jeff Turner

**T**here's what I can best describe as a uniform individuality to many of the people walking around the Wheels and Waves custom bike festival: jeans with turn-ups; open-face lids with bubble visors; baseball caps clipped to belt loops... even the socks appear to be a regulation brand and style.

The show itself is spread across an art gallery in the centre of Biarritz, a large field by the coast filled with military-style tents like a scene from *M\*A\*S\*H*, and a quarter-mile sprint race on the Jaizkibel mountain range. At first glance it appears to be almost trying too hard; with Harley-Davidson, BMW, Triumph and of course our hosts, Yamaha, all setting out heavily stylised stalls, the commercialism of the NEC is there, but with more bare metal and rags hanging out of back pockets.

It all seems a bit cliquey. In fact, the Wheels and Waves website (which does little to explain what the event is really about if you're not already 'in the know'), orders that "only pre-1975 and/or heavily modified motorcycles" are allowed to park within two blocks of the main event.

The bikes are varied; some are stripped bare, while others are dripping with the most elaborate details; the elaborate castings, and 'look what we did' machining a triumph of function over form.

But while I'm edging between the bearded, skinny, check-shirted masses, I see something else. A great bear of a man steps off an XJR1300; the machine's got flat-slide carbs, a flat-black paintjob and a flat seat. It looks brilliant, and judging by the state of the tyres and the rider's grin, it handles well too. For every motorcycle with a surfboard improbably strapped to the side, there's a bike that's been built to be ridden. Hard. On the second day of the event the art gallery display – where BMW unveiled its R nineT Scrambler concept, and where Yamaha presented Japanese custom legend Shinya Kimura's Faster Son MT-07 –

the pallets were half-empty. Not because the bikes had gone back to some oxygen-free storage container, but because they were being raced.

Regardless of what the organisers planned, the parking area at Cite de l'Océan – where the big manufacturers were joined by custom builders big and small, family-run leather-goods makers, plus a handful of brands like Alpinestars and Davida – was full of everything from a mint SP1 to a trike with no seat. The surrounding roads were gridlocked by a mixture of standard bikes and beautifully-crafted pieces of motorcycle art. All ridden there by real biking enthusiasts of every age.

## THE RIDE

Yamaha had arranged for a handful of journalists to ride XJR1300s around 500 miles from a Barcelona dealership to the event in southern France. We were joined by Shinya Kimura and Shun Miyazawa, Yamaha Motor Europe's product manager, and the guy behind



Matt Black's Anthony Partridge proves that the Yard Built Playa del Ray is much more than a show bike.



Born in Leicester, lived 14 years in Canada, and 17 in Spain. Anthony races motocross, a Kawasaki 636 on track, and rides customs on the road.







Tearing across Spain, denim shirt flapping in the wind, he proved customs aren't all show and no go

Yamaha's Yard Built projects. With him was Anthony Partridge – an impossibly cool custom bike builder, and part of the team at Marbella's Matt Black customs that built Playa del Ray, the Yard Built XV950.

Tearing across Spain, his denim shirt flapping in the wind to expose his tattooed back, he did a good job of proving that custom bikes needn't be 'all show and no go'. I struggled to keep up with him on my higher-pegged 1300, and when he started to kick the back out into mountain corners, I finally give up. A week earlier,

**BELOW:** Built at Triumph, these stunning bikes are a show of potential.

this machine was unveiled at the Bike Shed in London; "If you can't ride the s\*\*t out of it, there's no point in making it!" exclaimed Anthony after grinding half an inch of the pegs away on the sticky Tarmac.

When the rain started, a van didn't appear to scoop up the precious artwork (though luckily, there was one with our luggage, and a big pile of waterproofs). We rode on through, knowing full well that Playa del Ray was one of the important show-pieces of the Yamaha display at our destination.

## THE RACE

The XJR might have been redesigned to be easier to customise (there's more to the new 1300 than a smaller tank and less-practical seat), but I felt a bit of a fraud when, on the third day of the trip, we joined thousands of bikers on a ride from Biarritz to Spain's Jaizkibel mountain range. But I was starting to get the buzz – I was already looking for the inspiration that will fire my own project bike. I wore my own 'Faster Sons' baseball cap clipped to my trousers, but sadly the aura of cool







Matt Black Customs' Yard Built Playa del Ray is a showcase for the Yamaha XV950's potential.



The new XJR1300 was an awesome bike for the 500 mile ride, though traction control would have been handy in the storms...



Holographic Hammer's Scrambler was a stunning machine, up for sale at €30,000.

was never there, particularly when Shun had to point out I'd left the cardboard liner inside.

The sprint race was a quarter-mile stretch of single-track road, with a gentle left then right in the middle. Overlooking the Bay of Biscay, it gave some of the top custom builders a chance to show off their bikes. Kimura-san was given the brief to create a machine that he'd want to ride – he didn't win the race, but he clearly enjoyed thrashing something that took him four months to hand-beat.

One of the riders had a set of suede one-piece leathers with 'Ton Up' stitched on the back – it made me realise that the young crowd, beers in hand, shouting on the next pair of bikes to race to the finish line weren't that much different to the crowds that used to hang around the Ace Café. There was even the smell of Castrol R in the air.

But the vitality of the custom scene is far more important to riders like you or me than potentially bringing in a younger audience. This is already shaping the bikes we ride...



Walz's El Ratón Asesino described the Yamaha XV950 Racer.

## What is Yard Built?

Yamaha's Yard Built projects are an opportunity for custom bike builders to create a catalogue of aftermarket parts. While Yamaha would of course like you to buy its own accessories, the company understands that to really encourage its customers to make an individual bike, it needs outside businesses to support the factory machines.

It's also a chance to gauge the reaction of new products; the projects tend to have three stages: the concept, the production bike and the custom bikes. Look at Eau Rouge, Deus Ex Machina Italy's custom creation: in 2013 this was on Yamaha's stand at Motorcycle Live. It was Yamaha's way of effectively 'softening the blow' of the XJR1300 Racer, revealed the next year.

Now we have the Botafogo and Dissident that show the machine's potential. Marcus Walz's El Ratón Asesino led to the XV950 Racer, and

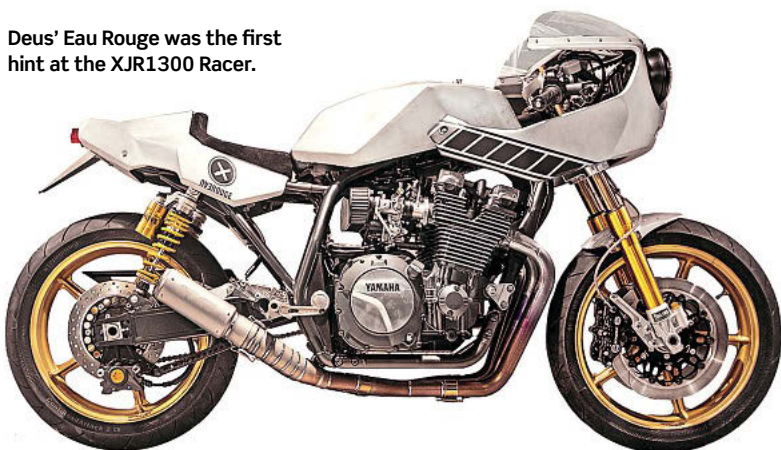
now we see Playa del Rey and the D-Side outfit.

Faster Sons is a spin-off of Yard Built, looking at more modern base machines, rather than focusing on the older air-cooled motors many customizers seem to gravitate towards – Shinya Kimura's MT-07 is the first bike to be revealed.



Shinya Kimura with his MT-07 Faster Son.

Deus' Eau Rouge was the first hint at the XJR1300 Racer.





## OUR CUSTOM FUTURE

The custom scene is influencing the new bikes manufacturers produce – look at Ducati's Scrambler, BMW's R nineT, Yamaha's XJR1300 Racer and XV950 Racer. But it's also starting to create opportunities – and frustrations – for the used market. Where bikes like Honda's old CX500 used to be relatively unpopular, their low price sparked interest in modifiers, driving the value up. The same happened with the NX650 Dominator – prices are climbing as more of the machines are snapped up for conversion.

Over a few beers, I spoke to Shun and Anthony – two of the most enthusiastic bikers I've met – to get their take on the scene...

**MSL:** What does a custom mean to you?

**ANTHONY:** "A custom bike is anything really... it used to be a Harley, even up until five years ago I think. But today, it's completely gone the other way – now anything's a custom bike. That's why I really enjoyed this project with Shun – it's like, doing a Yamaha, and seeing Yamaha coming in to the custom scene, as well as other brands – BMW, Ducati Triumph – you know, everybody's kinda comin' in to it.

"A custom bike is just your own kind of style. Even if it's like 'I don't like these handlebars because they're not comfortable enough, or I don't like this footrest, or I don't like this seat.' I think everyone will always modify the bike a little, where you don't with a car, or many other things in your life."

**SHUN:** "What we realised is that 10 years ago everybody was just following what we put on the market. They didn't really think about modifying it.



Anthony Partridge and Shun Miyazawa talk customs with John.



Today people are really looking for personal expression, and before the custom builders and manufacturers were totally separate, so we didn't really cooperate, but at a certain stage we realised we can't satisfy every single customer out there, and we need to rely on custom builders like Matt Black to support customers, to realise their individual statement.

"Our role before was to try to offer a final product that was beautiful and almost complete, and we didn't want people to touch it or modify it; we thought 'This is the best, so don't change anything.' But today we've totally changed our mentality and try to offer some simple, blank canvas bikes which can be either radically or slightly modified, because we don't really mind how far people go. As long as they don't spoil the riding capability, because we do believe that riding capability is still very important, and we hate the bikes that look cool, but don't ride well, because we really enjoy riding motorbikes."

**MSL:** How has Yard Built influenced production bikes?

**SHUN:** "We learned to try to understand where custom builders have issues on factory bikes. For example, where all the wiring is in the headlight, it's difficult to change the headlight to something else. Or if the main frame is one piece, they always need to cut the frame to make a café racer or Scrambler. We expect probably within two or three years, the MoT, type approval and government checks in Europe will spread..."

**ANTHONY:** "Spain's s\*\*t for customizers. The bureaucracy in Spain is a nightmare."

**SHUN:** "I think the whole challenge was whatever custom builders want to do, we just need to offer a very plain base, which can be reversible anytime they need to bring it back to factory status; no cuts, no radical modification. I think that was the core thing we got from custom builders – they hate us doing 'this', because then they have to do 'this, and this, and this'."

"Our mission is basically to produce a bike which can be easily customised by professional people, or in the home garage, but having a strong belief that everything has to be reversible, in case people need to."

**MSL:** Why is it so bad in Spain?

**ANTHONY:** "Look at changing four indicators for example: we use good-quality units at about €100 each. With the labour to wire it all up and do everything you're already looking at €550. We have an MoT, like you do in England; on a new bikes it's after four years, then every two years, then after 10 years it's every year.

"In Spain they Google your bike, and look at a photo of the year, make and model. If it doesn't look exactly like that, they'll say 'that, that and that has all been changed'. You can do those changes, but you have to hire a Spanish engineer – it can't be an English, Canadian, or

## How it affects the UK

Jeff Turner is Yamaha UK's marketing manager: "The Yard Built scene in the UK is still quite small, but the rise in attendance at London's Bike Shed event shows that the interest is there. It's been very niche, but there have been a few high-profile people in it, like David Beckham. If that then attracts national media coverage, we could see it being a really positive thing for biking. It takes a different route to cruiser and street, and could – in the future – grow into something really quite big.

"Yard Built shows a possible future direction for new bikes, and allows us to gauge the interest in that direction. But it's also there to inspire people to do things with their own bikes; to personalise them.

"More and more custom houses are coming to us wanting to do a Yard Built. It's credit to Shun [Miyazawa], who has been the driving force behind it. He really lives and breathes it. Traditionally, manufacturers like us have always had a 'product planning department'; it's a group of people that work out trends and look to the future and what to build. Some of it's logical progression, some of it is seeing a new

market potential, some of it is new technology led.

"It's understandable how that operates, but Shun has bought a different level to it – he's bought a different kind of imagination to it. The new-wave custom-cool is something you can't bottle; you either have the feel for it or you don't. Yamaha has given him a free remit to go off and do this stuff to see what comes out.

"People won't copy a Yard Built bike, but there might be an engineering detail, the way something's been done might make someone think 'oh, that would be fantastic on my project'. The inspiration can really be down to that level – what nuts and bolts are being used, what spokes in the wheels.

"I don't think you can just get on board with the scene – you have to immerse yourself in it; you have to be a part of it. Different manufacturers have different structures within them that allow them to go down that route or not. Yamaha's heritage in terms of custom is actually very strong, going back to things like the Dragstar, Virago, even the XS custom bikes from the early '80s give us a rich heritage of factory customisation. You have to earn the respect."



any other engineer – from a Spanish engineering firm, and you have to hire a gestor to do the paperwork.

“You have to make a project – you have to say ‘okay, we’ve changed this, this and this’. They have to be EU approved parts, but not all of them! It’s crazy – I can make a set of wheels that haven’t passed any approval, and you can put them on your bike. But if I put an indicator on, they’ll be like ‘oh no, that needs to have an EU stamp on it’. I can make a gas tank by hand, and it doesn’t have to pass any tests.

“So if you want to change four indicators, by the time we’ve had the paperwork done, you’re looking at almost €1000. Once that’s done though, it will always pass.

“The only thing that’ll never pass is your exhaust pipe – you always have to take the pipe off and put the original on. Most things can be changed, but the rear fender has to go over half the tyre, the indicators have to be 25cm apart, you have to have two EU approved mirrors, the licence plate has to be in the centre of the rear wheel... they’re very strict about that. It used to be just a fine for an incorrect plate – but now, if it’s not exact (and they’re bigger than UK plates), it’s not just a fine. If you run into a real jobsworth cop, they can do you for falsifying government documents, and you can go to prison.”

**MSL:** So when you’re working on a customer’s bike, it’ll tend to be more bolt-on, and it’ll be homologated.

**ANTHONY:** “Yeah, all the parts we built for that bike – except the gas tank and the fender – they’re all bolt-on. Later, we might do other models, and we might do different kits for fenders, but it’ll definitely have to pass European law. It makes no sense to do parts that can’t be legalised – it closes your market.”



Roland Sands' Glory Stomper is considered one of the first 'new-wave' customs.



Shun Miyazawa on his own Yard Built XV950 – these are anything but show machines.



People are looking for personal expression... we realised we can't satisfy every customer out there, and need to rely on custom builders



**MSL:** What makes a good, and a bad, custom bike?

**SHUN:** "I personally really do not hate any kind of custom bikes. I appreciate the self expression, so we should not really be judging anything; you make the bike that fits you. From a Yamaha point of view, we don't like bikes that are modified to look pretty, but sacrifice the riding. To give an example, Anthony has a particular taste, and at a certain stage in the XV950 project he proposed rigid rear suspension..."

**ANTHONY:** "I wanted to make a rigid chopper, because the frame is perfect. I'd still like to do one – in the States it'd work. I think there are a lot of guys out there that would make that bike into a chopper if they saw how easy it was."

"We're petrolheads at Matt Black though – my business partner used to race bikes, I used to race motocross... I love every bike for what it's designed for. To me, a motorcycle is about being agile, it's about not being in a cage... it's gotta make you smile. If you can't get on a bike and have a smile from ear to ear when you're done riding it, then to me you've ruined it."

"When we were riding here – even in the rain – it was a blast. It was fun. It brings people together. You don't have to ride a Harley any more to be part of the scene – it's why I embrace Yamaha and others coming in. We're sick of Harleys – I love them, don't get me wrong – there's something about them we all love, but you get tired of working on the same thing all the time."

There's a few customizers around the world that I think have really changed the scene and opened it up – Roland Sands I think – he doesn't believe it, but I said to him when he did Glory Stomper; "That's a game-changer man, it's sporty... I love that! I don't know if it was actually that bike that got the ball rolling, but I think he was definitely one of the first to say 'a custom bike doesn't have to be a big shiny Harley with this and that on it, fat tyre, slow, big ape-hangers...' That's what I love about Wheels and



**In the clamour of Wheels and Waves, nobody thought to ask BMW how practical a surfboard strapped to a bike really was.**



Waves – there's everything there; people just build something in their garage and ride it there."

**SHUN:** "In a way, I think the American custom scene was driven a lot by the 'show factor' because they have a lot of straight roads, they don't have to build something as rideable. The custom scene from Japan and the UK made a lot of change, because of course café racers came from the UK – looking good, but tuned up to go fast from A to B."

"Historically in Japan, none of the builders made something for show; all were done for customers living in Tokyo or wherever. It's a very congested city and they need to go very fast."

**MSL:** How does Yard Built benefit Yamaha?

**ANTHONY:** "Going back to Harley – if you own an H-D and want to customise it, you have 30 different companies with a catalogue a foot thick. You can build a bike that looks like a Harley, but doesn't have one Harley bit on it – even the engine! But for Yamaha and other brands, there isn't that really."

"Yard Built is a great way to create an aftermarket parts source for your models – give guys like us a bike and budget to do whatever we want, within reason, and create 'x' amount of parts. Everybody that's done a Yard Built project has done one, two or more parts – it's creating an aftermarket parts supply, and it helps us share marketing so it helps us all to grow within our industry."

**SHUN:** "As Anthony said, we have a great respect for Harley-Davidson – they created this whole industry over 100 years – they know what they are doing and I think Yamaha customers had such limited possibilities. Yard Built is always the story about making parts available for the final customers so that they can get inspired, and step-by-step and they can get very close to Playa del Ray, for example. When they finish with the bolt-ons, they then call Matt Black and get the last piece – the fender or the tank."

"Many custom builders are suffering by spending so much energy and time creating a show bike – they need sustainable revenue coming from parts, T-shirts... we wanted to support their business because we need them for the industry."

**MSL:** What part does 'Faster Sons' play in Yard Built?

**SHUN:** "When we were developing the new XV950 and XJR1300, we thought that we must keep 70% of the vintage feeling, and add 30% of modern feeling. So we started from a 20-year old bike – the XJR – tried to add a bit more performance and up-to-date riding. It was essentially very close to what it used to be in the 1990s."

## Clothing is changing too

It's not just the bike manufacturers that are calling on their heritage. Alpinestars was founded in 1963 by Sante Mazzarolo, an Italian artisan shoe-maker. He was interested in making footwear for motocross, and one day got talking to the owner of a local abattoir, who described how he fitted steel plates on the front of his boots to protect from the blades when

cutting meat. Sante realised this was what was needed for motocross shin protection, and the company was born.

Roger DeCosta won the 1971 MX world championship with Alpinestars boots, and as the company's reputation grew, Alpinestars won a prestigious Italian fashion academy award in 1972 and 1973 – the 'Oscar'. It was very rare for a motorcycle brand to win, so Sante decided to launch a new collection with the name 'Oscar' back in the early 70s.

Now the company has bought the name back; "With the renewed interest in heritage products that the custom scene brings, we decided to revisit our archives, and re-adapt our designs, giving them a modern twist with new protection," Joe McAvoy, of Alpinestars told me. "Now we have the vintage look, but with all the protection – Kevlar, CE armour... We're returning to our roots – we have a real authenticity, and a right to be in this market place. We weren't born 10 years ago, trying to mimic the authenticity."



**Claudio Reginato has been with Alpinestars for many years, and now develops new products.**





Quarter mile sprint race overlooked the Bay of Biscay.

The same for the XV – the engine was more than 10 years old. It was starting from what is already vintage, then adding new stuff.

“But then it came to my mind that starting from an old bike and trying to add new things, or starting from a new bike and trying to make it as simple as possible is basically two different things. About 18 months ago, I asked if using older air-cooled engines was essential to the scene, or if there’s a possibility of having new people who appreciate the latest technology with timeless design.

“It’s not so easy to convince ourselves when air-cooled V-twins or parallel-twins are so accepted in the market. The same with BMW’s air-cooled Boxer, or Ducati’s air-cooled Scrambler. We had some question marks, and Kimura-san’s project was started to answer this question mark. I discussed the idea with Kimura – he said ‘Shun, if you want, I can try. I’m a very artisan kind of guy, but if I like some of the engines from Yamaha, I can do it’.

“So I let him ride a few modern Yamahas – as well as other brands – and he liked the MT’s parallel twin. He said ‘I’ll take this engine, and try to add some of the Yamaha historical design, and add my own thing, so you can evaluate if your question-mark is valid’. Of course, in parallel, because otherwise we would be too late, we have been developing something. If people are motivated by the bike, then we will be bringing our own machine very soon.

“The only thing I told him was that he had to use a lot of modern components, such as engine, chassis, wheels... but at the same time make a bike that he’d want to ride.”

## Davida's view

Davida's British-built, high quality, luxury open-face lids have been popular for years, but as the maker of the official Wheels and Waves lid, we were keen to talk to Sharon Underhill, Davida's marketing manager...

**MSL:** What do you think of the fresh interest in custom and retro-styled bikes, like those here at Wheels & Waves?

**SU:** Everyone should be happy and supportive of anything which brings new people to ride two wheels. Davida have been involved in this European scene since it was just a few hundred people from the key custom bike builders. We also supported the first Bike Shed three years ago. We have had a strong involvement and following within the Scandinavian Custom Bike Scene for more than 20 years – we developed the Davida Speedster helmet in the late 1990s especially for this Scandinavian custom scene.

**MSL:** Have you seen much of a change in your customers' age range?

**SU:** We've enjoyed a popular following with the young people within every decade, regardless of the type of scene. In the mid-1980s and 90s many Japanese young people sought our Davida Classic as well as groups in London. The scooter scene has always been popular among the younger rider too.

**MSL:** Are you getting any other requests related to this side of the custom market?

**SU:** Every week we make one-off



designs for individual customers, as well as small volumes for various organisations; it's a very popular and valued service. As well as the Wheels and Waves custom helmets we also created the Lone Wolf specials for El Solitario and for Punks Peak racer and classic bike racers Tony Smith and his wife Sophie. Our stand at Wheels and Waves took orders for Custom designs too. We have also of course make the Distinguished Gentlemen's Ride custom helmets.

**MSL:** Some of the stereotypical, knobbly-tyre-riding custom owners get a bit of a slating from mainstream riders, but could a fresh audience in the industry be just what's needed?

**SU:** As riders ourselves we've attend many events over the past 40 years, and in our experience most motorcyclists are all really supportive of one another and just enjoy the fact that we have a common shared experience of riding, without judgement. It's riding two wheels that matters, not how or why.





# Old guys with stories

## Maynard Hershon



**O**ne Saturday I rode to Pine Valley, Colorado, for the annual Rhubarb Festival. As I climbed off my bike and took off my helmet, I realized I'd forgotten to bring sunscreen or a hat. A true emergency – if I spent any time wandering the booths at the festival for a piece of rhubarb pie and a coffee, then sat at a picnic table outside, my ears would burn, making my helmeted trip home very uncomfortable.

A guy rolled up on a Gold Wing. He has as much luggage space as a Cadillac. Maybe he has sunscreen, I thought. He did. He handed me the tube and told me about his club, “a motorcycle touring club for people over 40”, or so read the card he handed me.

At home I went to the club's website and emailed the contact. He wrote me back within an hour. We had a little back-and-forth. He put me on their email list for ride announcements. A few days later, I got notice that on the next Tuesday morning the guys were going to meet and ride to a casino in a 24-7 casino town near Denver for the buffet lunch.

They do it every Tuesday, all year-round. If it's snowing, they meet somewhere and carpool there.

At the gas station meeting place, I recognized no one. I looked around at the bikes and realised yet again that my 238kg ZRX1200 looked like a 250 in that company. There were three or four Gold Wings, a K1200LT, a sparkling new BMW GS, an R1200RT, two big twin Harleys and my Kawasaki. Again, unsurprisingly, mine was the only chain-drive bike present.

We hung out in a corner of the gas station for half an hour. I was reminded that old guys have stories. I was the only one there who hadn't heard those stories, I figure, so I was in demand. Popular. Where was popular when we needed it in high school?

The club advertised itself as being “for over-40s”, but I think it was really for over 65s. All seven or eight guys and the one woman must be retired, right? How else could they meet every Tuesday morning and ride to lunch?

One old guy, maybe almost as old as I am, looked at my squared-off rear tyre (a month or so after my New Mexico-Arizona trip) and told me the club would round off that tyre for sure. I did not scoff, but I wanted to.

A second guy had trouble hoisting his leg over the Gold Wing's seat and got help from another rider. That Wing looked like a 300,000-miler and maybe it was. Evidently he knows what to do with that motorcycle once he gets astraddle.

## Rhubarb, sunscreen and shaft drives... it's all happening in Hershon's world.

Not a mile out of the gas station, we turned onto a twisty road. I wasn't the last rider in line, but close to the back. I found myself riding as fast as I felt comfortable, as fast as I would like to ride on unfamiliar curvy roads, through gravel-strewn corners and across 'tar snake' road patching.

I could not push from my mind the incongruity of it: I had probably the fastest straight-line bike and really the bike most focused on curvy-road rideability. I was riding with what looked like the crowd that meets at the Golden Corral for the Senior Breakfast deal on Saturday mornings. Nevertheless, I was going as fast as I could.

I had to remind myself that those guys ride those roads once a week, spring, summer and fall. And because I had not ridden on challenging roads (with minor exceptions) since last year, it took me miles and miles to relax on my bike and ease up on the bars. Until I did that, I would lean the bike and then have to correct mid-bend like a damn novice. No kidding, it took me a long time.

The ride went well. No one in front of me did anything I judged to be stupid. The front few riders did pass cars over solid no-passing lines. I watched but did not do the same. I'd just got nailed in New Mexico. I can't afford another ticket and I'd have to explain to my wife Tamar why I got it. A wholly unpleasant prospect.

At the casino, because we were all old as the Pyramids, we got all we could eat for six dollars and 22 cents. Over all that food, guys told stories. I couldn't tell how many of those stories had been told before in that company and how many were fresh.

One guy remembered the Z-1, 900cc Kawasaki he bought new in '74. Another told us of 15 years and a million miles on loaded Moto Guzzi touring bikes. Another talked about his family and the daughter who suddenly decided to divorce the family and left forever. He wasn't sure where she lives now or how she's doing. I've given her up to the Lord, he said.

A few guys mentioned the CMA – the Christian Motorcyclists Association – and one or two talked about their churches. No one used profanity. To a man, they were welcoming and easy to be around. Maybe I'll do another ride with them soon and tell you all about it...

### Who is Hershon?

MSL's Maynard is our man with a very unique view on motorcycling from both sides of the pond. Yes, he is American. Yes, he does ride around on a second-hand Kawasaki that causes him grief... and yes, he does have his finger right on the pulse of life on two wheels



# TOURING

Your rides ♦ Our rides ♦ Tips and tricks

## 2mororider heads home

The youngest round-the-world rider is on his way back to the UK...

**B**y the time you read this, Rhys Lawrey should have succeeded in his quest to become the youngest person to ride around the world by motorcycle. As we went to press, the 23-year-old had passed the 50,000-mile mark and was in Greece before starting the final leg home.

Rhys left London in May 2014 on his Triumph Tiger 800XC and since then he has travelled through 48 countries in Europe, Asia, Australasia, America and Africa. Fortunately, he stopped in Athens long enough for us to ask him a few questions:

**MSL:** Why are you doing this?

**RL:** I wanted to inspire others in my age group to do something extraordinary, so I'm riding under the banner '2mororider – inspiring the riders of tomorrow'. I'm also raising money for The Prince's Trust. To donate to the Prince's Trust, please visit [www.2mororider.com](http://www.2mororider.com)

**MSL:** Where have you been so far?

**RL:** I started in London last May

and headed east through Central Asia, China, South East Asia and then Australia and New Zealand. I shipped to the USA and rode all the way south to Ushuaia and Buenos Aires. I passed the 10,000-mile mark in China, 20,000 in Australia, 30,000 in Colombia, 40,000 in Argentina and 50,000 in Greece. To make things more interesting, I'm also going for the Guinness world record for the most capital cities visited consecutively by motorcycle, which means I can't stop (except for essentials) between capitals. I broke the current record in Swaziland and since then I have been adding to the total – Stockholm was my 40th.

**MSL:** Why did you choose the Triumph?

**RL:** I love the name, the cool celebrity, leather jacket, shades, girl on the back type of look. I also wanted the middleweight bike since I'm solo – less weight and it's easy to manoeuvre. The three-cylinder engine is just magical and I knew that I could live on this bike for over a year.

**MSL:** What was your longest day?

**RL:** The longest so far has been 610 miles, which I had to do twice, from Cape Town to Bloemfontein and back. Berne to Rome was another long one at 580 miles. The Tiger is a great all-round bike, though ear plugs might help with comfort and cruise control would be nice! I've had no problems with the bike apart from having the steering head bearings and clutch bearing changed. [www.2mororider.com](http://www.2mororider.com)



### We want to hear what you're up to...

If you or your friends are planning a great trip, we'd love to hear all about it. Feel free to get in touch with us via [msleditor@mortons.co.uk](mailto:msleditor@mortons.co.uk)



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# The innocence of youth

**Richard Millington**



**W**hen I was told we had a retrospective of the Yamaha RD350 in this edition of *MSL*, it got me thinking back to my very first ride after passing my test all those years ago.

I rode straight back to work at the Ford dealer I was at for the summer on my bright orange CB125S. At the time, that 'S' was very important; it meant it was the ohc model, and therefore better than the much more common CB125J, though it wasn't an RD or DT 125, which were the 17-year-old's bike of lust at the time.

Still, I could hold my head high as I passed first time, and at the tender age of 17 years and four months I was about to embark on a journey that has lasted 30 years. A journey that has taken me to incredible places, and allowed me to see and experience things that 17 year-old could not even have dreamed of.

Back to work and a rousing chorus of 'well done' and 'where are the cakes then?' and a return to trying to fathom out whatever task I had been set. I don't think I recognised the twinkle in the workshop foreman's eye as he asked me what I was going to trade the 125 for. I was always tall, and my bike ambitions were as high as I was. No 250s for me thanks – I wanted a proper bike.

The twinkle grew brighter, although it might have been flash from the arc welder in the bodyshop. He had a mate selling his RD400; metal flake paint, Allspeeds, blueprinted and flowed. Now I didn't know what it all meant, but in the naivety of youth, you believe that things done must be done to make it better, so this one must be great. The mate was phoned and would bring it round for me to have a look.

When it arrived I was immediately in lust with it. Black with pink and purple paint crackling in the sunshine almost as much as the expansion chambers at idle. It was a thing of great beauty and greater noise. I am sure the foreman and his mate could both see the imminent sale, and I could see my whole summer's wages disappearing to satisfy my new love. Talk of race tuning and other mods was floating in the air. "Take it for a run," they said through wide grins.

And that is how the first proper bike I ever rode, the day of passing my test, was a fire breathing, snarling, crackling RD400. On with the helmet and to the joint tune of two-stroke howls and lots of advice to 'take it easy' and 'be gentle', off I went. Having come straight

## Richard's first big bike very nearly changed the course of his life...

off a 125 four-stroke I didn't know what a power band was. Sure, I had heard of it, but never experienced it. Down the road with gentle revs and a deep 'bwwooor' note from the exhaust, I was making my way up through the gears and all was well. Two miles in I was unimpressed. Yes, it was quicker than the 125, but the earth was not moving for me.

It was a tight-ish left into a sweeping right past my old school. Maybe that had something to do with it? Getting more confident I let the revs climb as I exited the left. And then the world exploded beneath me. It was like being hit in the small of the back by the 7:15 express to Waterloo. There was definitely swearing in the helmet.

Coming through the right-hander, the front wheel was going light and trying to lift. I was hanging on for dear life, and couldn't throttle off for love nor money. The screaming exhausts were thankfully drowning out my own screams as I passed the back entrance to the school and a load of loitering sixth-formers – all schoolmates who'd stayed on. I was out the other side of the power band and life was momentarily less crazy.

To try to calm everything down I changed up. The 7:15 to Waterloo was clearly being followed by the 7:20 as I got that whack in the small of the back again and the world started to go all blurry. By now I was on the straight past the sports fields and hanging on for dear life. I involuntarily kept it pinned and left the school and my mates in both awe and clouds of two-stroke smoke.

Gingerly arriving back at work I explained as calmly as I could that 'it's nice mate but I think I'll pass'. What I really meant was 'I'm only 17, I don't want to die and have no idea how to tame it'.

In the end I bought a GS550E. A proper bike – a big, four-cylinder and not too scary. I loved it and I'm still here to tell the tale. I'm fairly sure that if I had bought that RD400 then I would not be, and all the years touring – the great journeys, the friendships – all of it would have never been.

They say youth is wasted on the young. Maybe RD400s were wasted on the young as I quite fancy one now. I might even know what to do with it.

### Who is Millington?

Richard Millington has been riding for more than 30 years, touring for more than 25, and has never looked back. He's the founder of Motorrad Tours, and has ridden on five continents, guiding motorcycle tours in Europe, Africa and North and South America. [www.motorrad-tours.com](http://www.motorrad-tours.com) offers a wide range of adventures, with something for every rider



## CLUB FOCUS

### Triumph Owners' Motor Cycle Club



#### TELL US ABOUT THE CLUB

The TOMCC was founded in November 1949 by a group of Triumph enthusiasts based in South London and grew to over 1000 members by the mid 1950s. Today its membership stands at 6000 and it has more than 40 branches throughout the UK.

#### WHAT DO YOU OFFER MEMBERS?

TOMCC is a focal point for Triumph enthusiasts (classics or modern) to get together and enjoy a great social experience with like-minded people. The range of benefits include National Trifest Events, social gatherings, ride-outs and local events through the TOMCC branch network, a monthly magazine, a range of quality TOMCC branded merchandise, a classic bike valuation service, owner support and advice from other members and exclusive member discounts offers.

Whether you ride a retro/classic, roadster/sport, tourer/adventure or cruiser... there's an event for you. Local branches typically meet once per month, while Trifest events are about four or five times per year at various venues in the UK and Europe.

Local branch meets are social gatherings with general bike chat and occasional guest speakers, coupled with regular rideouts. Trifest and local branch rallies include rideouts, music, great food and a few beers.

With over 100 events run locally and nationally in 2015 there is an event tailored to every type of Triumph rider. A full list for 2015 is available at [www.tomcc.org/Events.aspx](http://www.tomcc.org/Events.aspx)

#### ANY SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS?

All you need to join the club is a Triumph motorcycle and £20 annual subscription.

#### HOW DO WE JOIN?

Visit [www.tomcc.org/Membership.aspx](http://www.tomcc.org/Membership.aspx) or go to [www.facebook.com/TriumphOwnersMCC](https://www.facebook.com/TriumphOwnersMCC)

#### Tell us about your club

for the chance to be featured in MSL. Email us at [msleditor@mortons.co.uk](mailto:msleditor@mortons.co.uk) for a questionnaire.

## EVENTS

### AUGUST

- |       |   |       |
|-------|---|-------|
| 7-9   | <b>Classic Motorcycle Festival</b> ,<br>Donington Park DE74 2RP.<br><a href="http://www.donington-park.co.uk">www.donington-park.co.uk</a>  | 28-31 |
| 7-9   | <b>Yorkshire Rock 'n' Bike Show</b> ,<br>Squires Café Bar, Leeds LS25 5LX.<br><a href="http://www.yorkshirerocknbikeshow.co.uk">www.yorkshirerocknbikeshow.co.uk</a>  | 28-31 |
| 8     | <b>Stilton Bike Show</b> ,<br>The Talbot Inn, Stilton.<br><a href="http://www.stiltonbikeshow.co.uk">www.stiltonbikeshow.co.uk</a>  | 30    |
| 8-9   | <b>Withernsea Bike Fest</b> ,<br>Winter Gardens, Withernsea.<br><a href="http://bit.ly/withernsea">bit.ly/withernsea</a>  | 30    |
| 9     | <b>Shugborough Hall Classic Car &amp; Transport Show</b> ,<br>Shugborough Hall, Milford ST17 0XB.<br><a href="http://www.transtarpromotions.co.uk">www.transtarpromotions.co.uk</a>   | 30    |
| 9     | <b>VMCC &amp; Classic Bike Day</b> ,<br>Ace Cafe, London NW10 7UD.<br><a href="http://www.ace-cafe-london.com">www.ace-cafe-london.com</a>  | 30-31 |
| 9     | <b>MotoGP - Indianapolis</b> .<br><a href="http://www.motogp.com">www.motogp.com</a>  | 31    |
| 9     | <b>Plymouth Motorcycle Club Megaride</b> .<br>Tel 07843 590968.<br><a href="http://www.plymouthmegaride.co.uk">www.plymouthmegaride.co.uk</a>   | 31    |
| 9     | <b>HJ's Custom Bike Show</b> ,<br>Jack's Hill Café, Towcester<br>NN12 8ET. Tel 07776 203159   | 31    |
| 9     | <b>Suzuki Biker Café Day</b> ,<br>Oakdene Café, Kent. <a href="http://www.suzuki-gb.co.uk/motorcycles/events">www.suzuki-gb.co.uk/motorcycles/events</a>  |       |
| 11-16 | <b>VMCC (Essex) Summer Camping Week</b> ,<br>Museum of Power, Langford.<br><a href="http://www.vmcc-essex.co.uk">www.vmcc-essex.co.uk</a>   |       |
| 15-16 | <b>The Ramsgate Sprint Reviva</b> .<br><a href="http://www.ramsgatesprintrevival.com">www.ramsgatesprintrevival.com</a>   |       |
| 16    | <b>National Car and Bike Hill Climb</b> ,<br>Oliver's Mount.<br><a href="http://www.oliversmounttracing.com">www.oliversmounttracing.com</a>  |       |
| 16    | <b>Ladies' Day - Bring What Ya Run</b> ,<br>Ace Cafe. <a href="http://www.ace-cafe-london.com">www.ace-cafe-london.com</a>  |       |
| 16    | <b>MotoGP - Czech Republic</b> .<br><a href="http://www.motogp.com">www.motogp.com</a>  |       |
| 16    | <b>Brackley Festival of Motorcycling</b> ,<br>NN13 7AB.<br><a href="http://www.brackleyfestivalofmotorcycling.co.uk">www.brackleyfestivalofmotorcycling.co.uk</a>   |       |
| 16    | <b>Suzuki Biker Café Day</b> ,<br>Loomies Café, New Forest.<br><a href="http://www.suzuki-gb.co.uk/motorcycles/events">www.suzuki-gb.co.uk/motorcycles/events</a>   |       |
| 21-23 | <b>British Superbikes</b><br>- Cadwell Park.<br><a href="http://www.britishsuperbike.com">www.britishsuperbike.com</a>  |       |
| 22    | <b>Northants Bike Show</b> ,<br>Star & Garter County Pub NN9 6AJ.<br><a href="http://northantsbikeshow.com">northantsbikeshow.com</a>   |       |
| 23    | <b>'Normous Newark</b> ,<br>Newark Showground NG24 2NY.<br><a href="http://www.newarkautojumble.co.uk">www.newarkautojumble.co.uk</a>   |       |
| 3     | <b>The Cheltenham Festival of Bikes</b> ,<br>Cheltenham Town Hall.<br><a href="http://www.FestivalOfBikes.com">www.FestivalOfBikes.com</a>  |       |
| 25    | <b>Lincs BTSC Open Meeting</b> .<br>Speaker, Pete Kelly OBM editor.<br>Bob or Maureen 01526 345720.   |       |
| 27    | <b>Day of Champions</b> ,<br>Silverstone Circuit, Towcester,<br>Buckinghamshire NN12 8GZ,<br><a href="http://www.silverstone.co.uk">www.silverstone.co.uk</a> , 0844 3750 740. <a href="http://bit.ly/riderschamps">bit.ly/riderschamps</a> |       |
| 28-30 | <b>Orkney TTT Bike Rally</b> ,<br>Sandwich Community Hall, Isle of Orkney KW16 3JE. Tel 01856 841502  |       |

- Moto Guzzi Club GB V-Twin rally**.  
[www.motoguzziclub.co.uk](http://www.motoguzziclub.co.uk)
- National Rocket Run**,  
Triumph Rocket 3 Owners Club UK,  
The Queens Head, Old Meriden  
Road CV7 7JP. Tel 07973  
257537/07966 405745
- The Sammy Miller Run**.  
01425 616644.  
[www.sammymiller.co.uk](http://www.sammymiller.co.uk)
- 44th Cheshire Classic Car & Motorcycle Show**,  
Capesthorpe Hall, Macclesfield,  
SK11 9JY. [www.classicshows.org](http://www.classicshows.org)
- Harley Day with Warr's, Ace Cafe**.  
[www.ace-cafe-london.com](http://www.ace-cafe-london.com)
- MotoGP - Great Britain**.  
[www.motogp.com](http://www.motogp.com)
- Roughleys Bike Show**,  
Heaton Lane car park, Stockport,  
Cheshire SK4 1HJ
- 10th Blenheim Festival of Transport**,  
Blenheim Palace OX20 1PP.  
[www.classicshows.org](http://www.classicshows.org)
- Craven Collection Motorcycle Museum**.  
Open Day. Brockfield Villa,  
Stockton on the Forest YO32 9UE.  
Tel 01904 400493.
- 43rd Notts Classic Car & Bike Show**,  
Thoresby Park, Ollerton NG22 9EP.  
[www.classicshows.org](http://www.classicshows.org)

### SEPTEMBER

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 3    | <b>Krazy Horse Late Nights</b><br>- Two Stroke Blue Smoke, Bury St<br>Edmonds IP32 6NU.<br><a href="http://www.krazyhorse.co.uk">www.krazyhorse.co.uk</a>  |
| 4-5  | <b>The 22nd Carole Nash Eurojumble</b> ,<br>near Southampton SO40 7GY.<br><a href="http://www.classicbikeshows.com">www.classicbikeshows.com</a>   |
| 4-6  | <b>British Superbikes - Oulton Park</b> .<br><a href="http://www.britishsuperbike.com">www.britishsuperbike.com</a>  |
| 5    | <b>Llandudno Goldwing Light Parade</b> ,<br>Lifeboat Ramp, Llandudno<br>Promenade, Snowdonia,<br><a href="http://www.Llandudnolightparade.co.uk">www.Llandudnolightparade.co.uk</a>                  |
| 5    | <b>Skillshare Morning</b> ,<br>The Aviator Restaurant,<br>Gloucestershire Airport GL51 6SR.<br><a href="http://www.rosparoadar.org/glos">www.rosparoadar.org/glos</a>                                |
| 5-6  | <b>Beaulieu International Autojumble</b> ,<br>Beaulieu National Motor Museum<br>SO42 7ZN. <a href="http://www.beaulieu.co.uk">www.beaulieu.co.uk</a>   |
| 5-13 | <b>The Jack Lilley 2T Challenge</b> ,<br>Jack Lilley Ltd, Ashford. Tel 08433<br>833133   |
| 6    | <b>27th Festival of 1000 Classic Cars &amp; North West Classic Motorcycle Show</b> ,<br>Cholmondeley Castle, near Malpas<br>SY14 8AH. <a href="http://www.classicshows.org">www.classicshows.org</a> |
| 6    | <b>Vintage Japanese Bike Day with VJMC</b> ,<br>Ace Cafe. <a href="http://www.ace-cafe-london.com">www.ace-cafe-london.com</a>   |
| 6    | <b>Wheels of Steel</b> ,<br>The Tank Museum, Bovington<br>BH20 6JG.<br><a href="http://www.wheelersevents.co.uk">www.wheelersevents.co.uk</a>  |
| 6    | <b>Baldock Bike Bash 2015</b> ,<br>White Lion, High Street SG7 6BJ.<br><a href="http://www.baldocktown.co.uk">www.baldocktown.co.uk</a>  |
| 6    | <b>The Norfolk 300</b> .<br>Norwich, Great Yarmouth and<br>Hunstanton to The Forum,<br>Norwich city centre.<br><a href="http://norfolk300.org.uk">norfolk300.org.uk</a>                              |

Please email your event details to [jlements@mortons.co.uk](mailto:jlements@mortons.co.uk)



# GIVE ME MOOR

With some time to spare in Devon, you'll be taking in a good part of Britain's second largest county, which incidentally has more road miles than any other.

WORDS AND PHOTOS: Peter Henshaw



**E**xeter's a good place to start this adventure. Find the big roundabout over the River Exe and take the B3212 heading west for Dunsford and Moretonhampstead. The climbing starts as soon as the houses stop, on a B-road with limited overtaking, but it's still entertaining. The white lines come and go as the road width changes, and there are glimpses of brown Dartmoor as you crest each rise.

Climb up the Teign river valley to Moretonhampstead, a small market town that seems to be in a Miss Marple timewarp. That was confirmed by the Morris Minor parked up for shopping, but destroyed by the presence of a deli that does chorizo sausage rolls and passable coffee, neither of which were on offer in Devon market towns circa 1955. Go straight over the crossroads and head out of town, up onto Dartmoor proper – hedges and green fields give way to drystone walls and brown scrub. It's bleak but undeniably scenic.

The B-road over the moor at first looks like a scratcher's dream, with sweeping bends diving into dips in the moorland before climbing up onto dramatic plateaus. And it would be, except that there's a blanket 40-limit these days, so it's time to slow down and admire

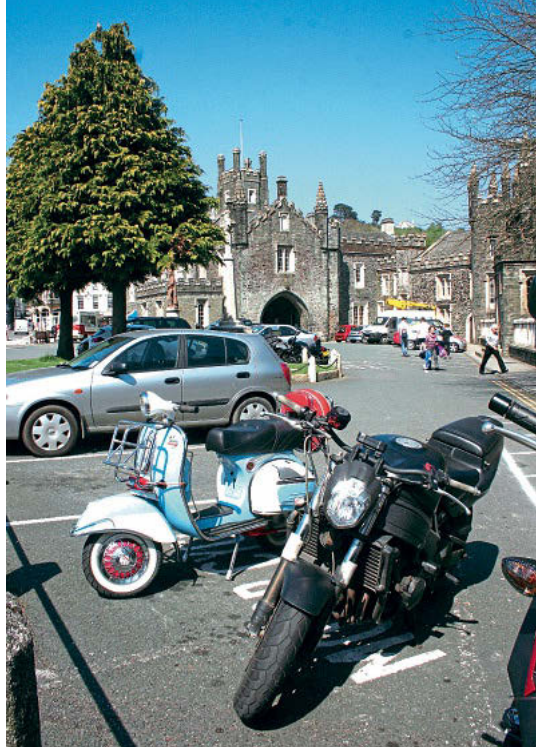


the scenery. This is just as well, because the scenery is stunning, and the sheep and ponies are wandering free. I'm convinced that Dartmoor sheep have a sense of humour – one galloped towards the road, making me cover the brakes, before veering off at the last second.

Head on through Postbridge, and at the T-junction turn right for Princetown/Tavistock. Past the Two Bridges Hotel and bear right to stay on the Tavistock road, unless you fancy a detour to see the prison, associated museum and moor visitor centre at Princetown. I'm told the prison itself is overrated as a

**TOP:** Dartmoor National Park – watch out for the ponies.





**ABOVE:** Red fingerpost means convicts passed this way... possibly.

**LEFT:** Tavistock and an eclectic mix of bikes.

**RIGHT:** Not all Devonian B-roads are twisty.



destination. One feature of these big granite lumps is that they end suddenly, and so it is with Dartmoor itself, giving spectacular views of the greener bits of Devon before you drop off the edge and twist down into Tavistock, a working farmers' town where muddy Land Rovers outnumber Mondeos.

Look for the bike spaces sandwiched between the war memorial and police station. A GS1200, KTM 690, Harley, restored Vespa, old Honda H100 and a matt black streetfighter were cheek by jowl when I was there.

## BEWARE THE TURBINES

Take the A390 (signed Liskeard) out of Tavistock, and after a few miles turn right at a roundabout on the B3362 for Launceston. This is great fun – a fast and swoopy B-road with some long straights. At the next crossroads with a stop sign, the B-road turns left, but carry straight over onto an unclassified road (signed Lifton) for more of the same, but without white lines.

The road tightens up as it twists down into Chillaton, where it's very easy to miss the sign left for Lifton at the first crossroads in the village. After another few miles you pop out at Lifton on what used to be the A30, but is now a very nice traffic-lite alternative to the dull dual carriageway between Launceston and Bodmin.

Turn left on this road and up through Lifton and a long 30 limit. You'll have already passed plenty of pubs, but just outside the village is a massive farm shop, complete with decent cafe and easy parking. Like all these modern 'farm shops', it's not the farmer's wife selling her own cheese and creamy milk out of the pantry, but still not a bad place to stop.

Ignore the A30 signs trying to funnel you onto the bypass and stick to the old road, which curves its way the last couple of miles to Launceston. I always think of this place, which sits on the border between Devon and Cornwall, as a sort of frontier hilltop town; the gateway to the real southwest. Follow the signs for Holsworthy A388. You'll get a nice view of the castle (tell me what it's like if you stop for a look round, as I never have) riding out of town, and where the A388 goes right, stay on what is now the B3254 to Bude.

This road starts swoopy but gets tighter on the high ground, dipping into Cornwall and back into Devon a couple of times. You get good views from up here, with the odd wind turbine dotting the green landscape.



**Duke of Bedford was also the Marquess of Tavistock, hence the statue.**

**BELOW:** Tempting tarmac over Dartmoor... but there's a 40-limit.

About 15 miles on is a crossroads, home to one of England's few red fingerposts. There are several theories as to why these aren't black and white, including that prisoners being transported to Australia once marched this way, or that it was the site of a gibbet. Either way, the adjacent Red Post Inn boasts a tea room and bar.

Turn left at the crossroads for a quick detour down to Bude, which doesn't have a prom but does have a big grassy outlook on which you sip your tea or lick ice-cream. The town is fast becoming a favourite with surfer dudes, so watch out for erratically driven VW campers.

If you've got time, head back to the A39, which is even known to the Department of Transport as the romantic 'Atlantic Highway'. At Barnstaple, look for the A377, which takes you along river valleys all the way back to Exeter. Otherwise, from Bude take the A3072 to Holsworthy, then across country, including bits of the A386 and B3216 along the way, to join the A377 at Copplestone, then back to Devon's cathedral city. And go easy on the cream teas.

*Thanks to Bransons of Yeovil (01935 701832) for the loan of the Honda NC750.*

## Write about your adventure

You don't need to be a professional journalist or photographer, just give a sense of where you've been and why other MSL readers might enjoy the same trip.

We're looking for the following: Day Ride – favourite day or half-day ride local to you – (1000 words); Mid Ride – a week or two in Europe (1400 words); Big Ride – anything more adventurous or further afield – (1800 words).

We'll need a selection of good, high-resolution pictures – at least 1MB each. When your story is published, you'll receive a free 12-month subscription to MSL. Submissions or questions to: [msltravel@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:msltravel@yahoo.co.uk)







Mid Ride



# HONEY AND HAM

Salamanca, western Spain – home to some superb roads and acorn-fed ham.

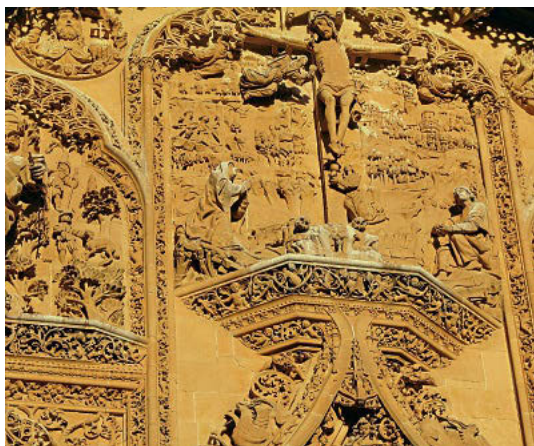
WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY: Chris Prior



**H**ugh Anderson arrived in Salamanca three years ago, fell in love with the place and decided to stay. It's easy to see why. It combines the relaxed atmosphere of an ancient city with the vibrancy of a university town. The old centre – a UNESCO World Heritage Site – is constructed in a golden sandstone that contains iron ore, enabling the creation of intricate erosion-resistant carvings. Hence the unique Spanish plateresque style, the finest examples of which can be seen on the exterior walls of the cathedrals. This golden stone seems to absorb the heat of the day and release it at dusk so that outdoor life can be enjoyed well into the late hours – call it outdoor central heating.

Hugh soon spotted the potential of Salamanca as a base for motorcycle tours and founded Sierra Alma Tours – it was with them that I explored the city and surrounding area. While it can be satisfying to wander aimlessly the maze of lanes in the old city (exploring the odd bar or two on the way) there's nothing like a knowledgeable guide to conduct a structured tour to some of the most important and historical sites. Zenaida, a young lady who is completing her studies in tourism at the university, did this for us.





Salamanca is around four hours riding from the ports of Santander or Bilbao, and Hugh will meet you off the boat. How the holiday pans out after that depends on what your interests are. Having sussed out the most interesting rides and being familiar with many lesser-known places of interest, he will tailor a plan to suit rider preferences. I decided to stay in Salamanca with ride-outs each day, but multi-centre tours can be arranged for those wanting to venture further afield than a comfortable day's ride from the city. I even had a Spanish lesson from Belén, who teaches Spanish to English speakers at the university.

### LACK OF... TRAFFIC

Our first ride took us south through Salamanca's fertile plains to the little town of Hervás, home to a motorcycle and car museum where the exhibits are housed in pavilions set in a fragrant rose garden. We returned to Salamanca via the mountainous roads of the Peña de Francia. Here I was amazed – as I was to be throughout the entire trip – by how well surfaced the roads are, even in some of the most remote places, and the virtual absence of traffic; except at weekends, when there are scores of bikes about, you can ride for hours in the countryside without seeing more than half a dozen vehicles.

In Spain it's common for lunch to be the largest meal of the day, and large it can be. A two-course menu del día could well challenge the heartiest appetite and leave the waiter disappointed when dessert is declined. This can be no bad thing, as a few hours grazing at tapas bars



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Catch the waiter's eye in this lot and you'll be doing well.

**TOP LEFT:** Golden sandstone contains iron ore which radiates heat on cool evenings.

**TOP RIGHT:** Salamanca's two cathedrals – the tower on the left is the new (16th century) one.

**RIGHT:** Jamon Iberica, and being acorn-fed makes it guilt-free (possibly.)

**BELOW:** Studious young man on the left is the mayor of Monsagro.



will suffice for an evening meal. Typically, €2.60 will buy a large glass of wine and a tapa (a small snack).

You must try jamón iberico – cured ham. The rides from Salamanca pass between groves of holm oak with their curiously shaped branches, but it's the acorns that are important, giving the meat from the black pigs that feed on them its prized flavour. Furthermore, it is claimed that the non-saturated fat of these acorns leads to similar properties in the jamón so that you need not worry about the rich, tasty fat of the ham.

We visited the village of Monsagro – the mayor Ángel is a friend of Hugh, and gave us a conducted tour of the place. Located at the western end of the Sierra de la Peña de Francia, Monsagro appears to have only recently caught up with the 21st century. For hundreds of years it was virtually isolated from the rest of Spain for most of the year and completely cut off when the snows fell. Locally quarried stone with curious patterns was used to decorate the exterior of houses, and





remained no more than a novelty until it was discovered that the decorations were 450 million years old. They were (and are) marine fossils, and since then the Department of Geology of the University of Salamanca has carried out regular research in the area. If you're interested, there's a walking route through the village which takes in the most significant sites.

## MOUNTAIN HIGH

"Where would you like to go today?" asked Hugh. There were several options, and I chose museums of honey and olive oil. We first visited El Tio Pícho – The House of Honey – at Las Mestas close to the beautiful valley of Las Batuecas. This family business uses traditional methods to produce honey and related products like wax, cosmetics and some powerful sweet liquors, and is justly proud of the quality awards it has received.

Seventy more kilometres of almost deserted road took us to the Olive Oil Mill at Robledillo de Gata, one of the timeless villages in the region, with narrow cobbled streets that need careful negotiation on a bike. As with the House of Honey, learning about the product finishes with a tasting. After a morning of honey and olive oil, it was time for lunch... my substantial steak in one of the village inns overhung its plate.

## Cathedrals and plazas

In the 16th century when Salamanca was rich enough to replace its 12th century cathedral, it built a new one virtually on top of the old. Climbing the tower gives your legs a good workout, but don't be put off. The climb is in stages and there are terraces and information rooms on the way to pause and get your breath back. The fine views of the city and surrounding countryside are well worth the effort, not to mention the €3.75 charge. It's free if you are retired, and in fact many entrances in Spain are free or have big discounts for the over 60s. It's perhaps no coincidence that the word for retired is jubilado.

Salamanca's 18th century Plaza Mayor, bounded by baroque style colonnades, is undoubtedly the grandest in Spain. Its vast space is usually full of people enjoying the relaxed pace of the city. From time to time the centre is used for rallies and demonstrations without disturbing those at the café tables lining the colonnades.

Until a generation ago this part of Spain was poor and undeveloped, leading to depopulation as the young sought work elsewhere. The Spanish government has now reversed this trend by supporting local enterprises and building roads as if with motorcyclists in mind. As the Tarmac climbs through the mountains the spring air is full of the sweet smell of broom, which at higher altitudes gives way to pine forests. All this gives easy access to ancient villages seemingly unchanged for centuries.

Another day's riding took us south-east into the Sierra de Gredos to the Puerto de Peña Negra, a pass 6260ft above sea level. Needless to say, the ear-popping ride up was exciting (no danger of wearing your tyres square here) and the views breathtaking. It's from this spot that hang glider pilots launch themselves, and later while taking lunch on a restaurant patio we could see some of them wheeling in the thermals. Also common in the skies are kites hunting, storks elegantly circling, and perhaps a griffon vulture. Storks build their nests high on roofs and pylons; it's considered lucky to have a stork nesting on a building here and many have frameworks installed on the roofs or church bell towers to make nest construction easier.

We finished that day with a guided tour of the caves of Ramacastañas where the various minerals absorbed by the water as it seeps through the rocks create different coloured stalactites and stalagmites.

The ride back to Salamanca late in the afternoon took us back over the Gredos range on those marvellous roads. That evening, relaxing with wine and a tapa, I noted in my diary, 'If I've had a better day's riding, I can't remember when it was.'

**ABOVE LEFT:** Hugh Anderson settled in Spain with his elderly K75 BMW and set up a motorcycle tour business.

**ABOVE:** Roads twist through the Sierra de Gredos.

**BELOW LEFT:** Stalactites at Ramacastanas.

**BELOW RIGHT:** Storks are considered lucky, so the Spaniards provide nest holders.





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# ELEPHANT HUNTING

Not that sort. Richard Meek wanted to see elephants in the wild, so rode a Yamaha Serow to West Africa to find them.

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY: Richard Meek

**Y**ou could take a pair of compasses, stick one end in East Anglia and draw a great arc on the map of Europe equivalent to seven days' riding. Apart from one glorious longer excursion, that's as far as I had travelled in 45 years of touring.

Having a steady job and commitments, I was, like so many, restricted to the annual fortnight. I managed Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Italy, Spain and – on that one hard-earned longer break – Morocco.

**ABOVE:** Moroccan mechanic's roadside workshop.



Recently retired, I set my sights on something more substantial – a trip to East Africa to see elephants in the wild. It didn't take long to discover that carnet costs and time put it beyond reach, not to mention the awful insecurity in Egypt and countries further south at the time. I decided that the only elephants I might see were likely to be at Whipsnade Zoo.

However, idly perusing my Rough Guide to Africa, I discovered that there were still elephants in the wild in West Africa. No rhino or leopards. No herds of wildebeest sweeping majestically across the plains... but definitely elephants. Checking out various online travel forums revealed that the Pendjari Park in Benin held substantial wildlife, while Benin itself turned out to be sandwiched between Togo and Nigeria. Like much of North and West Africa, it had been a French colony, perhaps best known for its ancient bronzework and relative stability since independence.

More research. Which bike to take? My ancient BMW boxer probably wasn't ideal, and after chatting to several overland travellers I decided on a Yamaha 225 Serow, as used by the truly amazing Lois Pryce for her rides across both the Americas and the Sahara. In a way, I was repeating history – 16 years ago I wrote about my adventures through Morocco (for MSL of course) on an MZ. The Serow seemed of a similar ilk – unthreatening, relatively easy to look after and cheap to run. Although not officially imported into the UK, there are plenty around as they are popular for off-road riding, and I found a suitable bike in North Wales.





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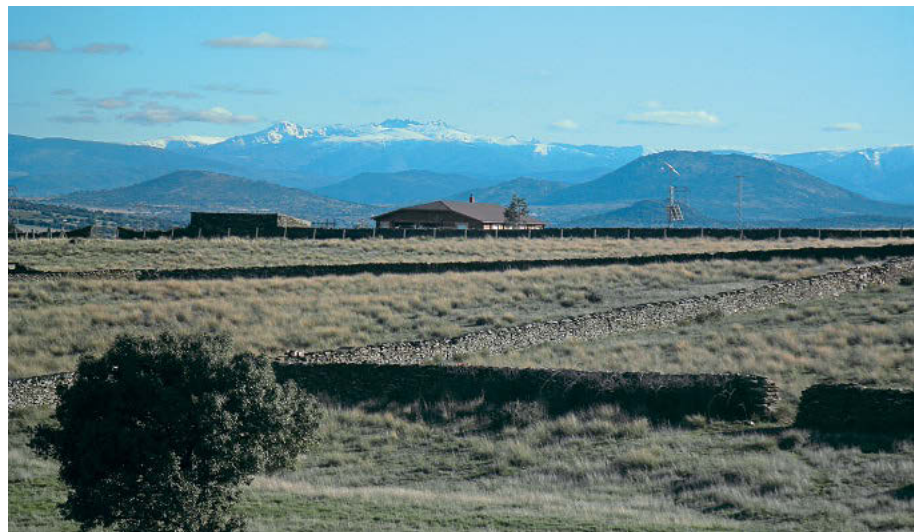
I kitted it out with Enduristan soft luggage, Wolfman tank panniers and tank bag plus an enormous top box made to order by Zen Overland. I added a Clarke 15 litre tank, heavy duty tubes in Avon Distanzias and after a painful ride home from North Wales to Norfolk, an Airhawk seat cover!

### MOPED RESCUE

It was mid-December when I finally took the Portsmouth to Santander crossing to Spain, and landed on a nasty cold rainy morning wondering what on earth I was doing. Humming along at a steady 55mph, I was initially riding through clammy fog among snow-clad mountain tops. The Serow coughed and spluttered a bit at the higher altitudes, but removing the air filter for a while appeared to cure this.

The weather warmed as I dropped south and I decided to stay an extra night in the beautiful town of Plasencia – a historic walled city in Extremadura. I was beginning now to shed layers of clothing... and to my shame, left my thermal long johns in a hotel room.

Arriving in Algeciras I was immediately set upon by the usual crowd of helpers/chancers who can sense immediately that you're not sure where to go. It really isn't difficult these days with so much help and advice available online to get this sorted before leaving home, but being soft-hearted and soft in the head, I always



**ABOVE:** Snow on the mountains of Northern Spain.

**TOP LEFT:** My hero Don Quixote in Plasencia, Spain.



**RIGHT:** Meeting my old friend Mohamed for mint tea after almost 18 years.

**BELOW:** Moroccan scooter boys guided Richard to his hotel.



think these folk are trying to scratch a living so I tend to pick an honest looking soul to show me where to park and buy a ticket. Friends say I do quite a lot of wealth redistribution on my travels!

The crossing to Tangier Med in Morocco was uneventful, and thanks to some excellent information sharing on the HUBB forum, I had the various entry documents already printed off and all formalities on the other side were handled in a brisk, professional manner... a far cry from my trip via Almeria/Melilla some years earlier.

But there is a limit to online preparation. I had pinpointed a likely hotel and printed off a map before leaving home, but in absolutely no time I was hopelessly lost. I stopped to ask a gang of moped-riding youngsters for directions. 'Follow us,' they cried (in French of course) leading me to the hotel via cycle tracks, gravel drives, bomb sites, shortcuts and around rather than through red lights... Hello Africa!

I had a few days in Rabat, waiting for the necessary visas for Mauritania and Mali, and took the opportunity to meet up with an old friend. Sixteen years ago, my MZ and I had strayed way off course, and perilously close to the Moroccan/Algerian border at Figuig. I had been helped by a wonderful Berber chap there with whom I had stayed in touch ever since. He travelled by bus the breadth of the country to meet up again. Mohamed bought me mint tea and wouldn't accept a penny (or Dirham) for his trouble.





## SNAPPED TAP

Visas in hand, I struck out south on the coast road. This so-called Atlantic Route is in excellent condition, and even way down south, quite busy with massive trucks and long distance coaches thundering by and wobbling my heavily loaded bike with their powerful bow waves. The wind too threatened to push me into the path of oncoming traffic, and it was a constant companion for many hundreds of miles. Not for nothing do wind surfers haunt this coast in the European winter.

As an aside, various travel books will tell you that local mechanics can fix just about anything. And it's true, though the methods may not be Yamaha approved... My fuel tap broke and the local roadside fixer said for me to go and drink some tea while he repaired it. Which he did, by banging a hacksawed-off bicycle spoke into the threaded hole where I optimistically hoped he might have screwed a new tap handle. Still, it worked.

Later, I yielded to the pleas of a bunch of local mechanics who almost brushed me aside as I tried to perform an oil change. No problem, they said and proceeded to round off the head of the bolt holding on the bash plate which one needs to remove to access the



**ABOVE:** Richard must have a small head, because his helmet won't fit you.

**ABOVE LEFT:** Unexpected banana plantations in southern Morocco.

**BELOW:** 'Ghost' hotel with Serow parked in the lobby. Richard was the only guest.



drain plug. I begged them to leave it to me as they produced a long thin tube which they planned to use to suck the old oil out through the filler. But we got there in the end, and I took a picture of them in Pit Crew mode.

I had a somewhat surreal experience near Essaouira when, after planning ahead and booking a remarkably cheap hotel online, I couldn't find it. I phoned and spoke to someone who gave me directions – in French – and again after turning down a long rough track in a forest of Argan trees, still couldn't find it. I phoned again and the man said he'd come out on his moped and meet me at a crossroads, which he did. He then led me straight back down the awful track I had just ridden out of, through some fields and to a gate in a high wall.

It was by now dark. He stepped through the gate and flicked a switch illuminating a truly palatial building. An empty hotel, more or less mothballed while its owner tried to sell it. He insisted that I ride the bike into the lobby and gave me a choice of all 24 rooms before slipping on a chef's hat and cooking me supper.

## Why a Serow?

I checked out a few dual-purpose bikes, but the Serow is renowned as a tough lightweight, with good ground clearance allied to a reasonable seat height. I also felt I wanted something light enough to pick up easily, and which promised good fuel consumption. It delivered on both counts, weighing about 110kg and easily giving 80mpg.

Fuel capacity is a limited 10 litres, so I fitted an aftermarket 15 litre Clarke tank. With that to draw on, the bike went onto reserve at about 330km (about 200 miles) and emptied at around 475km (just short of 300 miles). The Serow comes in 225 or 250cc versions, and power output for my 225 is quoted as around 20bhp – enough for 50mph cruising and more when needed, although headwinds can cut that back a little.

I originally fitted knobbles, but calculating the balance of decent tarmac and especially wet cold Spanish roads in December, changed to Avon



**Clean and spruce Yamaha Serow before the journey. Knobbles were changed for Avon Distanzia before leaving.**

Distanzias, which performed very well although I certainly missed the knobbles on the diversions and poor roads in parts of Senegal and Mauritania.

The basic original seat is far from comfortable beyond 60 miles, and was hugely improved with the fitment of an Airhawk inflatable overlay. I used our old friend WD40 on the chain, which is still in use thousands of kilometres later.

Overall, a very good choice for this trip. One often overlooked benefit is that a small bike attracts attention, but not awe and envy in the way bigger kitted-out bikes do.



**Sidi Ifni, populated by motorcaravan 'Sunbirds' who come south in winter.**



**Sunset at sea from the Terrace of the Hotel Belle Vue, Sidi Ifni.**





This sign once warned of land mines (which are still there).

**LEFT:** Giant camels greet the traveller at Tan Tan... gateway to the desert.

**RIGHT:** My ham fisted pit crew after a disastrous oil change.



## BEWARE. MINES

There are some fine places to stay and to explore in the south of Morocco. I particularly enjoyed Sidi Ifni and recommend the Hotel Bellevue with its fading Art Deco ambience and beautiful sunset views from the rooftop. It also serves alcohol.

After Sidi Ifni and the camel markets of Guelmim the land became dustier and drier, and at Tan Tan the massive camel statues that greet arrivals herald the gateway to the desert. I grew up in the Fens of East Anglia, an area where to paraphrase the great Bill Bryson, one can stand on a phone book and see an area the size of Wales. So the seemingly endless vistas of flat gravelly desert didn't worry me at all – I was more worried by the trucks and buses still thundering by and threatening to shove me off the road.

I rode on south across the disputed Western Sahara with its shanty towns of displaced people and heavy UN presence before arriving in Dakhla, where, as he showed me a room, the hotel manager said, 'I believe today is your Christmas!' And indeed it was. He directed me to a restaurant where I could celebrate by drinking wine with the traditional Tagine.

So far so good. A long dusty ride, but few mishaps and no real danger. However, still to come was the notorious border crossing into Mauritania with its wide stretch of No Man's Land between two countries in dispute, liberally strewn with mines, and with no clear route through the sand.



**ABOVE:** Fellow travellers in Nouakchott – Mahsa Homayounfar, David Delgado and their F650.

**BELOW:** Nouakchott, capital of Mauritania, suffers from traffic jams... like every other capital city.

Not too long ago, someone was killed by stepping on a mine and stories abound of highly suspect touts who lead the unwary deeper into the soft sand in order to charge a ransom for extracting them. Still, that challenge lay ahead and seemed far away as I relaxed and enjoyed Christmas in the sun...

*Does Richard get to see elephants?*

*Can the Serow make it? Find out next month*



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**2009 BMW K1300R**

# A CURIOUS BEAST

The elusive K1300R is anything but a typical BMW, but that doesn't stop it being a great bike...

**WORDS:** Chris Moss **PHOTOGRAPHY:** Mike Weston

**B**ack in 2005 few would have predicted BMW would ever build a bike as crackers as the K1200R. It represented a real shift in design philosophy for the German brand, which usually builds more modest and sensible machines. But the potent, ruggedly styled roadster almost single-handedly lifted the sporting image of the brand, receiving nods of approval from press and buyers alike who loved its 163bhp in-line four engine and surprisingly capable chassis. Its own race series – the Power Cup, which ran alongside European GP rounds – also helped to raise the profile of the model and the marque. The racers posted some highly impressive lap times, especially considering the bikes were so close to standard.

Since then, save some upgrades to the fuelling system to iron out occasional bugs found on some early bikes, the K1200R remained unchanged. It's been a lot more popular in Europe than it has in the UK, where the

**If you want a BMW, but something a little different, the K1300R is a pretty exclusive machine, particularly in the UK.**











## Specification

### BMW K1300R

**ENGINE:** 1293cc, liquid-cooled, 16-valve, dohc, in-line four

**MAXIMUM POWER:** 173bhp (129kW) @ 9250rpm

**MAXIMUM TORQUE:** 103lb-ft (140Nm) @ 8250rpm

**GEARBOX:** Six-speed

**FINAL DRIVE:** Shaft

**FRAME:** Aluminium twin spar

**SUSPENSION:** (F) BMW Duolever with ESA (R) Monoshock with ESA (electronic suspension)

**BRAKES:** (F) twin 320mm discs with four piston ABS calipers (R) single 265mm disc with twin piston ABS caliper

**TYRES:** (F) 120/70-17 (R) 180/55-17

**SEAT HEIGHT:** 820/790mm

**WHEELBASE:** 1585mm

**DRY WEIGHT:** 217kg

**FUEL CAPACITY:** 19 litres

R has largely been the choice of slightly older wannabe hooligans who've switched to the German badge for the first time. Most have modified their bikes in some way, with many choosing parts from the extensive range of aftermarket goodies or factory-fit options.

In 2009 the bike was changed significantly for the first time, featuring a host of new components including, most significantly, a larger 1300cc engine (actually just 36cc bigger) producing another 10bhp and 9lb-ft of

## VALUES

**£6000-  
£11,000**

**\* Prices are for early models sold privately in average condition, to almost new, well cared-for examples available at dealers.**

torque. Both bore and stroke were increased in size to achieve this, and together with revised cam profiles and timing, gave the motor a broader spread of power.

Maximum bhp was made at 1000rpm lower in the rev range, and the 1200's irritating mid-range harshness was smoothed out. Other minor modifications, including chassis geometry to speed up the steering, the second generation of electronically adjustable suspension (though only available as an option), and more sharply styled components such as the clocks and exhaust help to distinguish it from the first 1200. Very good though the 1300 is, however, just like its forerunner it never sold well in the UK.

## I OWN ONE

**Dave Smith, a 47-year-old IT engineer from Oxford, never thought he'd buy a BMW...**

For me, BMWs were for old fuddy-duddies, who were boring, over-the-hill types. I used to run Kawasakis and had a ZRX1200 which I really liked. But as soon as I saw the K1200R when it first came out I took notice and thought, hello, this is a bit different. I just loved the aggressive style of it. I put it to the back of my mind though, thinking the idea of owning a Bee-Em was a bit much.

But then I took the plunge and had a go on one in 2007. I can't remember why I found myself in a BMW shop in the first place, but just a few miles into the ride on the demo bike I knew I'd find it hard to resist. The engine was a peach with power everywhere. I ended up loving the bike, and really admiring

its attitude. Luckily there was a low-mileage one in stock so I bought that within a couple of days. Part of me couldn't believe what I'd done!

I used it for all sorts, and clocked over 15,000 pretty trouble-free miles on it. I had a couple of minor issues with the electrics and final drive box, but the dealer instantly sorted them as I took out an extended warranty. I traded it in for a 1300 in 2011 and I'm really happy with that too. It's got a bit more grunt and is generally more refined. I fitted panniers and a screen and have been to a couple of Euro GPs on it. Getting to Mugello and Jerez and back was a breeze, and I'll probably head off somewhere distant on it again later this year. I'm still wary of telling people I've got a Bee-Em, though to me my K is nothing like a BMW. I absolutely love it.

## WHAT'S IT LIKE TO RIDE

Essentially an upgrade of the K1200R, the bigger-engined version is a bike that you warm to more and more with time. Not that there aren't a number of virtues of the K1300R to enjoy from the off.

The BMW's engine is one of them, and is immediately impressive. Strong power and torque means once up and running you can quickly change up through the box without too many revs. Then you only really need to swap between the top two gear ratios to maintain just about any desired pace as readily and easily as you want. It really is extremely flexible, unhurried, and very relaxing to use. Should you spin the motor harder though, the difference in character is quite profound. Things really start to blur distinctly as soon as the rev counter gets to around 7000rpm. When that happens there's little doubt about the German firm's claim that the in-line four makes a maximum of 173bhp. To be honest, there's no real need to go into this zone, and revving the engine further towards its 11,000rpm redline





Watch for leaks from the final drive.



Duolever suspension gives no dive under braking.

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\* Costs will vary  
depending on labour rates  
and condition of your bike.



The four-cylinder's redline is up at 11,000rpm.

certainly requires plenty of clear road. Make no mistake this is an exceptionally powerful unit that can send the BMW to some silly speeds very quickly indeed.

Whoever designed the chassis deserves a pat on the back too, as the K deals very well with much that's asked of it. There's no doubt it's a big, heavy and lengthy bike and it pays to think ahead, especially when you're going faster. At times you can feel slightly restricted by its size and weight, and things such as tricky unfamiliar hairpin-laden back roads require a bit more thought and effort to negotiate smoothly. It's certainly never what you'd call a handful though – unless, of course, you start to use the engine much more seriously. The trade off for any of the more leisurely handling manners is planted and precise steering and massive stability, which even at very high speed gives a reassuring feel. It seems as though nothing could budge it off line, and any thoughts of weaves or wobbles always seem a world away.

The BMW's ride feels quite different thanks to the Duolever front end with its wishbone and single-shock arrangement. It behaves totally differently to normal telescopic forks, and gives an impression of real stiffness thanks to its lack of dive. Even so, as it rides the ruts and bumps so well, it's clearly working effectively to absorb them. It takes a bit of getting used to, but it warrants a big thumbs up when you do.

It's probably under heavy braking that it seems to act most alternatively. The BMW's brakes are extremely sharp and powerful – something your biceps can testify to thanks to the great strain the deceleration puts them under. But though those muscles are working hard to counter the G-forces being placed upon them, there's still virtually no dive from the front as there would be under normal stopping circumstances. It's quite weird until you're used to it.

## I SELL THEM

Peter Bright of Guildford BMW dealer Vines, knows his K1300Rs and owned an earlier K1200R for three years.

It's never been really popular over here, and the faired S sportsbike outsells it significantly. Those that do own them, rate them very highly though.

The bike is quite different to most BMWs and tends to attract a different sort of buyer – not what I'd call the typical mainstream sort of customer we normally see. Their ages and experience can vary a lot, and the R is liked by younger riders. Even so, many owners are over 40. The vast majority just use them for fun rides, and only average around 2000-3000 miles a year. However, a few owners do fit BMW panniers and a sat-nav to go off touring.

They're more comfortable than many think, and can clock up miles quite easily. We have one customer who's got over 40,000 miles on his. The majority though just fit a pipe and enjoy their bikes in good weather. They really like the aggressive style and speed of the bike, and are particularly impressed by the powerful engine.

It was an unusual machine for BMW to make, though as it's essentially just a stripped down S, it must have been easy to create. It's pretty robust, and though we service quite a few each year, we only sell two or three annually. Owners tend to look after them and get them dealer serviced. We very rarely see one in poor condition. The K1300R is very reliable and has no real issues.







## USEFUL WEBSITES

Good information and advice can be gained on the dedicated websites:

[www.bikersoracle.com/kseries](http://www.bikersoracle.com/kseries)

[www.motobins.co.uk](http://www.motobins.co.uk)

[www.motorworks.co.uk](http://www.motorworks.co.uk)

[www.nippynormans.co.uk](http://www.nippynormans.co.uk)

[www.james-sherlock.co.uk](http://www.james-sherlock.co.uk)

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Though not without problems, a K1300R has to be considered a good used buy. Even if it's usually owned by riders you wouldn't normally associate with the BMW brand, more often than not, they share some common traits like being older and more caring of their machines. The K1300R might have a madder image and reputation than most other bikes produced by the German factory, but it still doesn't attract the real nutters.

Though it was more common on the 1200, some 1300s can suffer from cam chain and tensioner woes. Listen carefully to any top-end rattles, especially on start up. Manual cam chain adjusters are available and a wise fit. Some rare cases of main bearing failures have been heard of, but as these were on very early bikes, it's most probable the issue has been sorted under warranty. Rougher-running engines can be improved with the use of super unleaded fuel, which also gives better mileage.

Gearboxes can have a clunky, notchy feel in the lower gears or when the engine gets very hot. The action improves with mileage and the use of good-quality synthetic oil. Clutches

can sound a bit rattly. Some early bikes had a tendency to overheat thanks to blocked radiators – the issue could lead to restarting problems in hot weather and failure of electrical parts like ignition coils. The switchgear isn't fond of getting hot from too much strong sunlight either. Batteries kept in good condition help starting in all temperatures.

CAN bus electrics usually work well on new bikes, but performance can deteriorate with age. Many components are coded to the bike's chassis number. If you need to replace them, you must order new. Clocks aren't always totally reliable.

Check the bike's steering with a test ride. Worn ball joints in the front suspension can lead to vagueness and tracking issues. It's not an easy job to sort and is best left to a dealer unless you're experienced. Check the final drive hub for oil leaks. Bearings can fail with expensive consequences. Brakes need to be kept clean and serviced to give their best.

There aren't too many 1300Rs available, but most come from good homes so it's likely you'll end up with a good one.



One bonus our test bike featured, and an extra you'd be wise to look for on a used bike, is the ESA electronic suspension adjustment system. I've really grown to like the arrangement after having tried it on a lot of different BMWs. Being able to alter the springing and damping to instantly suit a wide variety of circumstances is a highly convenient benefit. All you have to do to cater for things such as faster riding, a passenger, or rougher roads is push a bar-mounted button. It's as simple as that, and with nine alternatives to choose from, there's normally an appropriate setting to suit. Though I have to add, all of them are quite firm, underlining the sporty bias of the bike. On the subject of switchgear, the K1300R was one of the very first BMWs to feature a conventional indicator rocker switch, and is all the better for it. I'd prefer it if you could feel it clicking into action a little more though.

Firm suspension or not, the bike still has a fairly high level of comfort. The riding position is best termed as sports tourer-like, but the bars and footrests are sited well enough for longer rides, and the broad seat's good enough to give comfort between refills. Our test bike had a small screen fitted which helped to fend off the physical ravages of higher speed wind more effectively than you'd expect, and extended the time before a rest was required. Though once you've spent a few minutes strolling around the services after your 160-200 mile stint, you'll feel good to go again.

The K1300R may encourage some questions from others at petrol stops; it's certainly a curious-looking beast and has a very solid, purposeful, almost industrial style that's quite unlike that of any other bike ever made. I'm not sure I'd call it attractive, but it's certainly striking. And as there aren't many around, if you like to stand out, the BMW is well-worth considering.





### FINISH

Generally strong and well built, the BMW still needs care and attention to look good. Neglect can soon lead to corroded fasteners and flaking paint. Luckily the vast majority of owners take care of their bikes and keep them in very good order.

### HOME MAINTENANCE

Most owners have their bikes dealer serviced, especially during the first two years to meet the conditions of warranty. You can tackle many regular and smaller service jobs at home as access is good, but the 18,000-mile valve checks need a special tool and only dealers have the diagnostic equipment to check and fix faults. A good service history will help resale value.

### EXTRAS

There's a huge range of stuff available from BMW, Touratech and Wunderlich. Most owners stick to fitting more sensible extras like luggage, sat-navs and end-cans. Quick-shifters can be seen on some bikes too. The optional centrestand is very useful.

### FRONT SUSPENSION

Feeling rather different to normal forks, the Duolever arrangement gives no dive under even the heaviest of braking, yet is perfectly compliant over bumps. Brilliant ESA system completes the dream, allowing instant adjustment at the touch of a button. Bliss.



### TYRE CHOICE

K1300Rs can consume rear tyres at an alarming rate if you're enthusiastic with the throttle. Using top-brand multi-compound sports-touring rubber will reduce bills and maintenance intervals. They easily offer sufficient grip.

### TOURING

Far from being a one-trick sporting pony, the K1300R is also adept at covering big miles with just a few modifications. Fit a small screen, BMW's superb expandable panniers, a tank bag and sat-nav, and head off as far as you fancy - quickly and comfortably.

### ENGINE

A real attraction, the power and torque of the in-line four motor wins plenty of fans. Very usable at lower rpm, but rev it harder and the pace is lifted a whole lot more. Some might say its power could be spread more broadly, very few would argue it isn't thrilling.

### RELIABILITY

Not the 100% bullet-proof bike the BMW reputation might suggest, you'll still be pretty unlucky to be let down by the 1300. Electrical gremlins, cam chain woes and hot running issues could affect the earliest machines. All in all though, the K can be viewed as dependable.

### BRAKES

Another real strong point, the 1300's brakes can handle all that's thrown at them with ease. Good at going quickly, the BMW is just as competent at reducing that pace. ABS is effective and not too intrusive. The calipers must be kept clean and serviced to keep them sharp.

## OTHER BIKES TO CONSIDER



### DUCATI DIAVEL

2011-current, 1198cc, 90° V-twin, 162bhp, 210kg  
Another unusual offering from an established manufacturer, the Diavel also has superbike performance. A stonking engine, quality chassis and hi-tech components make the Duke an impressive package. Looks divide opinion though.



### TRIUMPH SPEED TRIPLE R

2012-current, 1050cc, in-line triple, 133bhp, 186kg  
One of the most iconic British models ever made. Improved with age, the triple is stylish and speedy and very entertaining. Plenty of power and torque make speed gains easy. Competent chassis keeps it all under control.



### SUZUKI B-KING

2007-2012, 1340cc, in-line four, 164bhp, 235kg  
Those futuristic looks aren't for everyone, but the super-grunty motor and capable chassis are much more likeable. Way easier to ride than its looks might seem to suggest. Never really caught on, but could still become a classic yet.



### APRILIA TUONO V4R

2011-current, 999cc, 65° V4, 167bhp, 183kg  
Essentially a naked, highly-equipped superbike, the Tuono boasts fierce performance, precise handling and masses of character and style. But the fantasy is tempered by impracticality with a poor fuel range and mile-limiting discomfort.



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The heel-plates are showing signs of wear already.



## The rider

### TONY CARTER

Tony has been riding for over 30 years, and a professional bike journalist for 21. He's ridden most machines you know plus many race machines and factory MX prototypes in most areas of the world.



# The two-faced beast

Tony's fallen in love with Suzuki's comfy, but very, very fast naked sports monster...

I feel as though I should set my stall out early on this one... I love GSX-Rs. They're meaty and full of character. They can be as annoying as they can be thrilling. They can agitate and stimulate in equal measure. There's one thing though that a GSX-R NEVER is: boring.

I don't care if the fuelling is off a notch. I don't really care if I have to roll off a bit in the bumpy because the bike gets a bit flighty, and I don't care that this bike (if we're talking reality-world here) is about as touring-practical as a chocolate teapot. This is a GSX-R in everyday guise. So use it as such.

I'm 400 miles or so into my tenure with the blue bullet and initial impressions are, as you can probably guess, pretty good. The bike's riding position is very easy to live with, it's less radical in terms of pitching you forward than the Triumph Speed Triple, and way more comfortable than the Aprilia Tuono.

There's plenty of leg room and the 'bars that look so very wide in the photos are actually fairly narrow in real life. In fact, that's an overriding

memory of riding the GSX-S; just how narrow and small it feels on the move. It's not like the GSX-R is a hulk of a bike, but you still feel like you're riding something serious and substantial. With the GSX-S there's little in the way of actual motorcycle in your line of sight, which makes you appreciate the speed of the thing even more.

Ah yes, the speed, and that delicious, gorgeous, expansive motor. Much has been made about how the S came to us from the GSX-R1000K5 – a bike that was almost universally regarded as the best road-going GSX-R that Suzuki ever built. For me this bike certainly feels like a K5 in places – let's say it's about 85% K5. The chassis feels short and low, like it should, and the motor just wants to play – but to really let the horse out you've got to stir the box, which might annoy some riders who just want to lazily surf a long wave of torque. But for me (who grew up a rev-happy, crash-happy kid on screaming two-strokes) it's a great way to ride.

Keep the revs over 7000rpm and go clutchless through the box and the GSX-S just rewards you over every

inch of road in the most brilliant way. It's a delight to ride and the howl from the stock exhaust is mutedly reminiscent of GSX-R racebikes from a few years ago.

So far I've found that Traction Control setting two of the three is the way to go for me on Lincolnshire roads for commuting. Turning the system on and off is simple thanks to the pretty basic switchgear on the left handlebar; turning it off completely is where the fun really lies though. Get the TC down to zero and the bike turns into an old-style GSX-R-style nutter. It really can be the best of both Suzuki worlds.

Niggles? None really. The heel-plates are already showing lots of wear, but aside from that, nothing to report. Even the seat's pretty comfortable.

So how much do I like the big blue at the moment? Well, I've got a TomTom Rider 400 sat-nav fitted for the big journeys, and I'm also planning to go to a GSX-R-only trackday. So in my world that means that this bike is a perfect commuter AND a racetrack loon. Which is what Suzuki set out to make with the GSX-S.

## The bike

### SUZUKI GSX-S1000A

Cost new: £9499

Performance:  
143.5bhp,  
78lb-ft

Wet weight:  
209kg

Tank size:  
17 litres

Seat height:  
810mm

## This month

Miles this month: 416

Miles in total: 501

Average mpg: 44

Highlights this month: The engine, chassis and looks.

Lowlights this month: Not fitting the option heel-plate covers.



## The rider

### BEN MILLER

An ex-national level racer, Ben has been a keen biker since the age of 10, when he took up motocross. Since then he's gone on to own a string of track race bikes and commuters for the road



Space is restricted on the offside pannier due to the exhaust.

## The bike

### TRIUMPH TIGER 800 XRx

Cost new: £9499

Performance:  
93bhp, 58lb-ft

Wet weight:  
216kg

Tank size:  
19 litres

Seat height:  
810-830mm

## This month

Miles: 646

In total: 1019

Average mpg:  
44.1

Highlights:  
Covering more miles than expected

Lowlights:  
Getting neck ache from crouching below the screen

# Practically perfect

Fitting luggage has bought Ben and the Tiger even closer...

Seven weeks in and I've got to admit, I'm growing ever more fond of my new two-wheeled friend with every ride. Not just because it's a truly enjoyable bike to ride, but because it's proving to be so practical.

The Tiger – an XRx spec machine – arrived decked out with Triumph's Adventure panniers. This luggage system features a 'one key' locking mechanism whereby the key for the bike's ignition is used to get into the storage too. I found them brilliantly simple to fit and remove – I even went as far as putting a stopwatch on to find out how long it took; fitting them came in at a swift 13 seconds, while removing was even quicker, at a mere 9 seconds.

In my opinion, many similar systems can completely spoil the look of a bike,

however you can appreciate a lot of consideration has gone into the aesthetic design of these panniers; they complement the tough, rugged styling of the Tiger perfectly.

Build quality is everything you'd expect from Triumph, the finish being pretty exceptional, and with an overall capacity of 62 litres, they can accommodate a lot, but only a full-face in the nearside pannier. Their plastic and brushed aluminium build looks great and is durable so far, as well as being fully waterproof, and my only gripe would be that offside pannier being smaller to accommodate the exhaust.

If my dear wife would be more inclined to travel with me on the bike, I'd probably want to increase the capacity by fitting the matching top box, bumping up boot space to an

ample 97 litres. Triumph currently offers the full Adventure Luggage Pack at £905, a saving of £160 compared to buying it all separately.

This month I've covered a total of 646 miles and have seen a return of 44.1mpg. I stuck the cruise control on at 70mph when I was riding on a nice, flat surface with very little wind and achieved a consistent 60mpg, which in my opinion is more than adequate. If on a long distance trip and you managed to see a return of around the 60mpg mark then you'll be looking to rack up approximately 250 miles between filling-up – I don't think you can knock that.

I'm hoping to try a taller, slightly wider screen for the Tiger in the coming week, so I'll fill you in on that front next month.



# VF-aahh

Comfy and confidence-inspiring... just like pulling on your favourite leather jacket.

**A**m I the only person who thinks the latest VFR800 looks like Ducati's Desmosedici RR Moto GP replica? Maybe I'm infatuated with it already. I'll admit to some history here; I've owned two VFR750s, and an RC30, had an emotional stake in a couple of NC30s, run several as long term test bikes and nearly bought at least three more. But I hadn't ridden a VFR800 since 2006 and never quite gelled with the VTEC version.

That's changed. Getting back on a VFR feels like spending an evening with a few old mates you haven't seen for years. The riding position is how you want a motorbike to be; sporty but not extreme like a racer. Comfy (longest day in the saddle so far is 400 miles), but purposeful. It steers like a VFR too, rolling into corners with very little rider input, somehow finding the line you hoped it would without crashing down on the brakes or bouncing back up when you let them off.

Suspension does a good job of controlling the bike over bumps with a ride quality that's a little on the stiff side, but still acceptable. The brakes

(still Honda's linked system, but now refined so you don't really notice) are powerful, but with a range of operation that gives room for error in the wet too.

This latest VFR800 is the essence of what Honda stands for, distilled into one product. Smart engineering makes a bike that does exactly what an owner expects. There are a few surprises... the first being the engine, which belies the VFR's sensible reputation by behaving like a manic 400 with pistons made from razor blades. Once warmed up the VTEC's switch between two and four valves is more subtle than before, but Honda's choice of gearing means you somehow end up doing back roads at 10,000rpm in screaming four-valve mode, and motorways at 6300rpm – the top of two-valve mode – without ever forcing it.

Unless top is very much taller than the rest, the VFR feels like it's geared for around 120mph. It revs like a 400 on Avgas, and feels more like a sports bike than most proper sports bikes these days. All that and it averages mid-40s mpg figures (mid-50s on the motorway), which seems pretty good to me.

The other thing that's at odds with the Honda-ness is the traction control. It works... I think. In as much as I haven't had any problems with traction yet. But it looks clumsy. A plastic block bolted to the left hand switchgear is very un-Honda. Why bother with a switch? I can't think when I would like less traction so why give me the choice? Likewise, I don't need two settings. I don't get (or need) a choice of ABS settings or the chance to switch that on and off. And I don't need one for TC either, especially one that looks like a pimple. Just give me a warning light that tells me if it stops working.

That's a niggle, I know, and might drop the VFR from being a 95 per center to a 94.5. Truth is that riding this VFR is a reminder of how good a motorcycle can be when you just build something that works. On paper, the 2015 VFR isn't that much different from the original 1986 bike. Similar power, similar weight, similar geometry, similar performance. Motorcycling has moved on a lot in the intervening 29 years, but bizarrely, the subtle-but-effectively evolved VFR feels better than ever.

## The rider

### STEVE ROSE

Steve Rose has been riding for 32 years and still gets far too giddy about every motorcycle he rides; "The best bike in the world is the last one I rode." Worrying then that he was senior road tester on the UK's two biggest motorcycle monthlies. Owns a 1991 Yamaha TDR250, currently scanning eBay for a Yamaha FZR1000R, MZ TS150 or a 1980s chopper called Feline Fantasy.



## The bike

### HONDA VFR800

**Price:** £10,499

**Performance:** 105bhp, 55lb-ft

**Wet weight:** 239kg

**Seat height:** 789/809mm

**Tank size:** 21.5 litres

## This month

**Miles:** 1437

**In total:** 1688

**Average mpg:** 48

### Highlights:

Familiarity, ease of use, sportiness with comfort too. Equipment (centrestand, heated grips), handling, brakes

**Lowlights:** Err... indicator switch is a bit stiff, and a proper grab rail instead of handles would make pillion comfort 100% better





## The rider

### MALC WHEELER

Malc's been riding for over 50 years and has decades of motorcycle industry experience. He has almost 20 years racing under his belt, and picked up three Isle of Man TT podiums along the way, missing the elusive win by just one second! His day job is editing our sister magazine *Classic Racer*.



## The bike

### INDIAN ROADMASTER

**Cost new:** From £21,999

**Performance:** 90bhp, 119lb-ft

**Wet weight:** 421kg

**Tank size:** 20.8 litres

**Seat height:** 673mm

## This month

**Miles:** 386

**In total:** 4386

**Average mpg:** 49mpg

**Highlights:** The Indian finally arriving.

**Lowlights:** That rusty exhaust.



Surely one of the nicest looking V-twin motors ever made?

# Indian Summer

Malc finally gets his hands on the new Roadmaster... let's hope it was worth the wait!

To say the Roadmaster makes a statement would be, er, an understatement! It cannot be ignored. People love or hate the red and cream colour scheme; I love it, but even compared to the motorcycle it's aimed squarely at – Harley-Davidson's Electra Glide Ultra – it's big.

My first proper ride on the Roadmaster saw Mrs W and I ride in to a personal rain cloud, with us equipped in riding jeans and leather jackets. Our wet gear was safely tucked away in the workshop at home, some 30 miles back. This is when the Indian first really impressed; after 20 miles it was only when we slowed to town speeds that a single drop of rain touched us.

The large, and I mean large, batwing fairing and equally generous leg shields stopped the water in its tracks, with only a small adjustment to the very effective electric screen being needed to keep my visor clear too. I've not ridden any motorcycle with better weather protection.

A big, heavy, unfamiliar bike, short legs and a few weeks out of the saddle, I admit led to a slightly wobbly start. But a couple of hundred miles in and I'm growing to like the Indian more, which is contrary to my norm. I've oft been accused of falling in love at first ride with every new machine I get to ride, and to a degree that's true. But it wasn't the case with the Roadmaster.

Friend and Daytona winner Don Emde's late father Floyd – also a Daytona winner – was an Indian factory rider back in the day. This close association meant that Don had already done lots of miles on the Roadmaster before it was launched; "You'll get on great Malc, there is



One big machine, and a Lancaster Bomber, or should that be two classics and an Indian? Thanks to the Panton Brothers for the loan of the Lancaster.

nothing not to like," was how Don summed it up. And so far he is on the nail.

The Indian power plant, apart from being one of the most stylish-looking V-twins I've ever seen, is exceptional. It has enough torque to pull down a house, with a linear delivery that's also very forgiving when you get lazy with gear changes. Cruising in sixth, a couple of hundred revs short of 3000rpm, gives you 80mph – perfect for motorway work, and with the easy-to-use cruise control active a very relaxing and economical ride. But kick it down a gear for an overtake and it really gets up and goes.

While the fuelling makes for smooth progress, the same can't always be said of the gearbox. I'm short in the leg and the gear lever is a long way forward, certainly compared to my own H-D; if I shift forward in the saddle I can achieve good, slick, if slow, changes, so

perhaps my 29in inside leg is at fault not the Indian. I'll keep you posted.

The finish is superb, and I love the way Indian has used its iconic logo at every opportunity. The brand, despite its absence and a chequered middle history, is still big in the USA, something we saw evidence of during our annual Daytona visit last March. The challenge – especially in Europe and the UK – will be building a strong dealer network and making enough motorcycles to meet demand when they do.

The more miles I do, the more I enjoy the Roadmaster, to the point that it has shrunk, in my eyes at least. Oh, but there is one thing which really niggles, and Indian isn't the only American motorcycle manufacturer to suffer this annoying and unnecessary problem; why, in this day and age, does the inside of the end of the silencer need to go rusty whenever it gets wet?



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# You're my bike now

Choosing the right accessories has made the Versys the perfect match for John.

I can't see the Versys being 'right' for me any more on day-to-day trips now. Okay, the 649cc motor doesn't give the thrill of bigger machines, but for every journey, it seems to be the Kawasaki's keys that I reach for. Inspired by Graham Mudd's previous generation Versys 650 in the last issue, I think I've found the mods that do – and don't – work for me...

1 The Givi Trekker luggage is perfect for me – the 52L top-box takes two full-face lids, while the narrower 33L panniers (you can get 46L versions) don't impede filtering too much, but are versatile enough for clothes, computers, magazines and more. They also have an ingenious lid that can open just at the top – to avoid your gear spilling out – or fully, like normal panniers. With frame and fittings it costs £916.72 and while Kawasaki's own £1005.50 luggage system is more modular, I love the Givi's design and versatility. I've also fitted the back-rest, as without it my wife found the box uncomfortable to lean on.

2 A brilliant bike sat nav, the £319.99 TomTom Rider 400 is reviewed in this issue.

3 This £338.95 Comfort Gel seat from Kawasaki looks great and is designed to spread your weight more efficiently. I find the standard seat too soft, but this is way too firm for me and my wife – we both found it really uncomfortable on an 80-mile trip. The standard's going straight back on.

4 These Denali D2 lights are incredible – at £312.49 they offer a dual-intensity, so I wired mine in to be low all the time and go to full power when I flick to high-beam. This stops drivers from getting dazzled, but even in bright sunlight the clean white LED illumination really makes the bike stand out. At night, the already good Versys dip beam is well complemented, giving an improved spread on the road. On full beam the difference is incredible – I used to dislike riding backroads in the dark, but the Denalis have transformed that. Thoroughly recommended.

5 The Versys' standard screen is a vast improvement over the last one, but this £113.95 Kawasaki version is 45mm higher and 60mm wider. It's effective and keeps the wind off you well, though with a full-face lid on I found

myself getting a little too hot, as there was no wind driving in through the chin vent. If you like tall screens it's a very good option, though it is only available in a light smoke colour.

6 The £41.66 Denali Soundbomb is loud... At high speed the noise still seems to get lost in the wind, but in central London it has come in very handy more than a few times. Sounding like a truck can have its advantages.

7 The £129.99 PDM 60 power distribution module fitted under the seat controls all the gadgets on the bike (besides the horn, which has a too-high current draw). I've set it to turn my accessories on seven seconds after the ignition key is turned – it makes adding kit simple and tracing problems a doddle.

8 The R&G crash protection totals £141.65 and will hopefully never get used. It gives good peace-of-mind though and the swingarm bobbins are essential for lubing the chain on a paddock stand.

## The rider

**JOHN MILBANK**

Editor of MSL, John's owned everything from a DT80 to his current bike, a Ducati Monster S4R. Excited by all machines, his dream garage includes a Pan European and a VMAX.



## The bike

**KAWASAKI VERSYS 650**

**Cost new:** £6749

**Performance:** 68bhp, 47lb-ft

**Wet weight:** 216kg

**Tank size:** 21 litres

**Seat height:** 840mm

## This month

**Miles:** 899

**Miles in total:** 2098

**Average mpg:** 49.4

**Highlights this month:** Creating my perfect day-to-day bike

**Lowlights this month:** The hundreds of flies that swarm around the yellow paint



# A sharp move

MSL's funky pocket rocket has a new rider... and another new fan

Saying goodbye to the XJR1300 was hard, but I have to be realistic. Earlier this year I suffered a back injury while on a snowboarding holiday. Three prolapsed discs and five months (so far) taking things very easy and rediscovering all kinds of swear words I thought were gone forever. Riding the big Yamaha was brilliant, but pushing 230kg of old-school musclebike around with the engine off was a relapse of the prolapse waiting to happen.

So when Carli announced she was moving on, my first reaction was 'Can I have a go on the KTM please?' closely followed by 'Congratulations, well done, good luck etc.' obviously.

I'd assumed the 147kg RC390 would be a doddle to move around. And it is when you're off it, but getting it out of the packed MSL shed required me to sit on it and paddle backwards. Which is when I realised that middleweight sports bikes have moved on a long way since my old Honda VFR400R. Where the bikes of the 80s and 90s sat low at the back, the KTM sits high and rides on stiff WP suspension. So despite it being tiny and the seat being narrow, I'm still on the tips of my tip toes.

Once out and on the move though things change rapidly. At the time of writing I've only had it a couple of

weeks and so miles covered has been limited but the RC390 is already my new favourite thing. It reminds me a lot of the Yamaha TZR250 I used to own. Fast enough to boss any road, light enough to make me feel invincible and nimble enough to seemingly give a choice of about eight lines through any corner.

The steering is accurate like few other bikes I've ridden and the suspension – so often the let down of small-capacity sports bikes – is something quite spectacular. There's a ride quality on bumpy roads that usually needs a price tag at least twice as big as the RC's, and there's control too. No steering damper needed, but no nasty moments. Riding the KTM on the back roads feels like those on-board TT videos – tucked in, hanging off the seat just a little and flick the bike from side to side in an instant. I love it.

The biggest surprise is the engine. I've never owned a single-cylinder bike and expected it to be rough, poorly fuelled, low-revving and vibey. Not so on all four counts. The RC's motor revs very freely, has a huge spread of power and is smooth apart from low-speed urban running. Performance-wise it'll be a close run thing between the RC390, Kawasaki's Ninja 300 and Yamaha's R3. They're all within a few quid too.



Julie's not a fan of the KTM's mirrors.

The small tank and the very-big-but-not-really-good-enough mirrors are the only niggles so far. I love the engine, love the handling, love the funky clocks and love the powerful but not too sharp brakes with standard fitment ABS. And I love the styling too – modern, cool, very KTM.

Some of the older (or should that be 'more experienced') MSL teamsters reckon it's an RD350LC for the 21st century. That's a generation before I started riding in 1992, but at a local bike meet last weekend I parked up next to a modified Yamaha LC and a rare grey-import Yamaha R1-Z (TZR250 engine in a roadster lattice frame).

Maybe I'm missing something, but to me those bikes looked ancient; flimsy, crude and sat low at the back on soft suspension. The KTM doesn't need that kind of comparison; it's a bike that will find its own audience and it deserves to build a reputation like those 80s two-strokes. It really is that good.

## The rider

### JULIE BROWN

Magazine publisher Julie Brown passed her test in 1995 and has ridden a plethora of different bikes since then. Cruising across America on a Harley, blasting around the Dales on a sports bike, city riding on a moped; Julie is happy on two wheels no matter what the bike or how fast or slow the speed.



## The bike

### KTM RC390

Cost new: £4998

Performance:  
43bhp, 26lb-ft

Wet weight:  
165kg

Tank size:  
10 litres

Seat height:  
820mm

## This month

Miles: 128

In total: 2060

Average mpg: 70

### Highlights:

Riding a sports bike for the first time in what seems like forever.

### Lowlights:

Realising I'd swapped the XJR (aka Eric) for something taller.





## The rider

### JAMES ROBINSON

Editor of *The Classic MotorCycle* magazine, 36-year-old James passed his test in 1996, and has ridden and owned a wide range of bikes, spanning more than a century. The stable currently includes a 1992 Ducati 750SS, 1937 Velocette KTS, 1930 Sunbeam Model 9 and 1928 Rex-Acme TT8, among others...



## The bike

### DUCATI SCRAMBLER CLASSIC

**Cost new:** £8130

**Performance:** 74bhp, 50lb-ft

**Wet weight:** 186kg

**Tank size:** 13.5 litres

**Seat height:** 790mm

## This month

**Miles:** 105

**In total:** 595

**Highlights this month:** Proving that those hip-looking tyres grip well too.

**Lowlights this month:** Sending it back for its first service.

# Classic action

Motorways last month, track days this – James likes to keep the Scrambler out of its comfort zone...

**W**hen the designers of Ducati's Scrambler were creating their machine, they more likely would have had people who hang around in Shoreditch Park than Cadwell Park in mind. Certainly, the advertising for the model is more aimed at hipsters than wannabe racers. I can't imagine many have gone before us and taken a Scrambler out on a track day.

The occasion was the Morini Riders Club annual track day at Cadwell Park. This long-established event is one that's well worth participating in, and has become something of a 'must-do' for many of us locals. There are three groups; fast, medium and Morini. Basically, the club does all the organising, then invites riders to fill the other two groups, leaving the Morini sessions to members on mainly 1970s 3½ models, with a few modern 9½s thrown in too.

For years the local Velocette owners' club has become involved too; it started because Velocette Venoms and Thruxtons (the 1950s and 60s 500cc singles) were basically about the same speed as the 350cc 1970s and 80s Morini V-twins, and owners often had an example or experience of both, as they

seemed to attract like-minded buyers. It has progressed further now though, so that there were only two or three Venoms with the other 10 or so Velos. Pre-war racers of various provenance (some genuine KTT racing stuff at one end through to my own cobbled-together bitsa), while a couple of pre-war New Imperial racers joined in as well. Add to that about two-dozen Morinis.

I decided to put the Scrambler Classic in the van along with my own classic bike, simply as it afforded an opportunity to do something different with it, and in truth it's nice to have something easy to ride alongside the Velos as well. I went out in three sessions on it with the second the undoubted highlight. Another thing with the Morini Day is that there's loads of track time.

So how did it go? Well, it was brilliant fun, though did throw up a couple of limitations in terms, mainly, of ground clearance – at the hairpin, I did manage to clip the exhaust a couple of times – surprisingly this touches down before the pegs.

Still, it proves that those tyres, with their knobbly-ish centre and slick-ish outer edge really work. I also found that on higher speed corners the front

did feel a little light and flighty. But again, that was to be expected; this isn't a machine conceived with the purpose of being hammered around a racetrack. Yet just as with its motorway exploits, the little air-cooled Ducati coped admirably, though this time it brought plenty of smiles too. When I came in after one of my sessions a chap was waiting for me; he'd apparently ordered himself a Scrambler (an Icon) and wanted my opinion on what I thought so far. Needless to say, I told him how pleased I am with it – it's an easy-going bike that's got a lot going for it. It's far more than a machine to be left outside trendy London bars – it's built to be enjoyed by anyone, anywhere.

Other than that, I've had a fairly quiet month with the Scrambler, mainly owing to the fact that before Cadwell it was getting dangerously close to its advised pre-service mileage limit, so it had to go back to Ducati UK shortly afterwards. I had a couple of long trips to do, so borrowed Bruce's BMW (again!), but I'll be getting some real mileage in on the Scrambler soon. I might even try to get round to using it as its makers intended, and take it out for a nice, relaxing summer day's riding!





# Big mile smiles

New panniers and a long trip are all taken in the BMW's stride

It's 261 miles from my house to Swansea, 160 of them being made up of pretty mundane motorways... unless you decide to spice things up by wearing fairly inappropriate bike gear. I bet you've never seen an R1200R rider dressed in motocross boots and a peaked lid?

Thankfully, not everyone's as stupid as me, but there was reason to my madness. Hidden away in the stunning Brecon Beacons is BMW's Off Road Skills school, and that was to be the destination for my long termer and me, complete with newly fitted, colour-coded panniers.

I couldn't wait to get cracking with the five hour journey, adamant that at the nearest point I'd steer away from the major roads and go looking for some twisting corksers through Herefordshire and down further into Wales.

By the time I'd reached Worcester, I was desperate to leave the bland roads behind having spent several hours with my peaked helmet being pitched around like a windsock and my neck muscles yanked all over the shop. Leaving the motorway, I headed towards Herefordshire, finding myself

on numerous narrow, hedge-lined roads, littered with stunning cottages and magnificent vistas.

Without a sat-nav fitted, I admit to having gotten lost several times, but with the sun shining and the R1200R bounding around enthusiastically, I didn't care how many extra miles I clocked up. My fuel consumption did though. Interestingly, I've been achieving average MPG's of around the low 40s since I started out with the BMW, yet on the motorway at 70mph, I was averaging in the 50s – despite having the panniers fitted and extra weight on board.

I eventually hit the congested M4 – what a downer – but at least it prompted the opportunity to try out a bit of filtering with the panniers in place. They are surprisingly cavernous, being able to each consume a helmet, yet their tight fit to the subframe means they protrude less than the width of the bars.

This being the case, paranoia had me cringing a few times as I squeezed my way between a number of tight gaps, to which there was undoubtedly twice the room I needed to get through cleanly. Reaching my hotel, the specific key-

coded luggage was openable effortlessly, locking back up with equal ease. They're also by far one of the easiest systems I know of to remove and refit.

Having concluded two fantastic days with BMW ORS on the Brecon Beacons Adventure, I was fired up for the return leg, opting for more motorway on my return to speed the job up. I stopped once on the route to top up the fuel, but otherwise nailed the distance in the shortest amount of time possible.

On the whole, the R1200R is a great bike for going long distances, proving both spacious and comfortable. Cruise control definitely made the job a lot easier and I was pretty chuffed to discover the saddle stayed comfortable all the way home. Admittedly, a taller screen would have been a nice addition, but I'm a big fan of the low Sports screen fitted when I'm tackling the local lanes, because it never compromises your vision by getting in your eye line.

Besides, if I wanted outright protection from the elements, I would have chosen a faired bike. I'm glad I didn't; I like the al fresco experience.

## The rider

**BRUCE WILSON**

Bruce is MSL's deputy editor. An experienced road-tester, he's ridden almost every bike built in the last 10 years, and many more besides. At the weekends you'll find him competing in endurance races (and winning) with his brother, or just pottering around the UK's roads.



## The bike

**BMW R1200R SPORT EXCLUSIVE**

**Cost new:** £11,700

**Performance:** 125bhp, 92lb-ft

**Wet weight:** 231kg

**Tank size:** 18 litres

**Seat height:** 790mm

## This month

**Miles:** 895

**In total:** 2007

**Average mpg:** 43.2

**Highlights:** Getting to really know my bike

**Lowlights:** Not being able to ride further







# Sound of the police

Roger Jones | KTM 1290 Super Adventure | **Miles in total:** 3677 | **Miles this month:** 686



It all started when I was riding the KTM out of my village... in the distance I spotted a fluorescent jacket. I wasn't speeding, but being a curious old so-and-so I stopped for a talk.

It turned out the jacket was occupied by Colin Ironmonger, the local Community Traffic Officer, that the camera he was holding was good for 1000m, that motorcyclists were the best at keeping speeds down in built up areas (but not so out on the open road) and that Colin rides a Virago.

A week later, after inviting Colin over for a look at my stable of bikes, he turned up with his colleague Patrick Welby-Everard who, as it turned out, was a Versys rider.

All bikes were uncovered and the KTM was wheeled out for a better look. There were plenty of 'oohs' and 'aahs', especially when it was started up. Neither had ever seen this model KTM and were surprised when I told them of the £16,999 price tag, though Patrick still couldn't resist a selfie on the KTM to show his mates back at the station.

Two great policemen who love their bikes and who are very realistic in their approach to speeding, but be warned, if you push your luck then you will have to accept the consequences.

Let's keep them on our side if we can. It's amazing what a bit of light-hearted conversation can do to cement relationships.



# Another new home

Steff Woodhouse | Yamaha XJR1300 | **Miles in total:** 1333 | **Miles this month:** 242

Finally, I have the keys to the latest incarnation of Yamaha's XJR1300. It's a little different to the pocket rockets I've ridden before, but the style reminds me of the AMA Superbike racing of the mid-to-late 80s.

The XJR is back to basics – I'm not talking about the hours of painstaking work Yamaha's design team have put in, I'm talking about the fact we have no ABS, no 10-stage ECU mapping, no anti-wheelie, and no traction control. This bike takes you back to a time when riding bikes gave you freedom, exhilaration and a sense of the mechanical engineering.

On-board it feels lighter than it looks – it could be down to things like the tank being plastic not metal as on previous models, or the way the engine sits within the frame. The position of the bars, pegs, gear lever and rear brake is perfect – everything seems to be in a natural position for me at 5ft 7in and I get the impression long journeys will be nothing but pleasurable.

It's got five gears, but I don't think it actually needs any more than two – the pulling power of this four-cylinder, 1250cc air-cooled motor is phenomenal – 25mph, fifth gear, open the throttle and away she goes. I was expecting it to rip my arms out of their little sockets, but it's not that aggressive. It's no slouch, but its power delivery is more on the side of useable. Granted, it's not an R1, but I do like my fast bikes!





## Gerbing 12v heated vest & battery

TESTED BY: John Milbank | £149.99 & £109.99 | [www.gerbing.co.uk](http://www.gerbing.co.uk)

I always thought I was pretty resistant to the cold, but as age inevitably creeps in, I'm coming to really appreciate heated kit.

I'd previously used Gerbing's excellent £169.99 heated jacket liner, but this vest is offering even more versatility and practicality. The fine 'Microwire' heating element is totally unobtrusive, guaranteed for life, and allows the chest, back and collar to heat up very quickly when plugged into the bike.

Keep in mind you also need to buy the £39.99 12v Single Controller (or the £59.99 Dual Controller if you want to use other heated kit); this waterproof unit and its cables can add a little bulk, but I find it best to keep most of it with the bike. There are four levels of heat (five on the Dual Controller), and the settings are remembered when the power's disconnected.

I usually wear large bike gear, but found the hand-washable vest fitted best as a medium, tucking under my textile jacket well. This is a very well-made piece of kit, with a soft-shell, wind-resistant outer as well as internal and external pockets. Off the bike it still looks good, and it's here that the expensive, but excellent optional lithium-ion battery comes into its own.

Using very high quality cells, and offering what appears to be a quite genuine

5200mAh, it has the potential to power the vest at maximum for just over an hour (the vest draws 4.5A). When stopping at a café, it's great to be able to keep the warmth going, and the battery (which weighs 363g), can be controlled through three levels by the two buttons on its front, or with the supplied wireless remote.

It has an audible feedback of level and status, as well as a USB socket to quickly charge your phone or tablet. The vest plugs directly into the battery, which is charged from the mains, so there's no need for the separate Single or Dual Controller.

My only criticism is that the power lead exits the inside of the vest, and isn't long enough to reach the battery if you pop it in the inner chest pocket. You need to use the supplied bum-bag, or get an extension lead from Gerbing, though I risked my warranty by very carefully creating a small hole from the inside of the left outer pocket to the inside of the vest, through which the cable passes neatly and is just right for popping the battery in safely.

This isn't cheap kit, but it's of a very high quality, with superb service and support.



## Furygan Dorsale XP1 back protector

TESTED BY: John Milbank | £59.99 | [www.nevis.uk.com](http://www.nevis.uk.com)

This CE Level 2 back-protector uses a soft, flexible D30 panel inside a lightweight, adjustable carrier. The shoulder straps are high at the top, keeping the armour tight against your back while preventing it getting hooked into your leathers when you take them off. The ribbed armour design and breathable fabric helps keep the air circulating on hot days.

Being D30, the Dorsale moulds to your body very quickly and comfortably – once on it doesn't interfere with your riding or comfort. The orange armour is easy to remove from the carrier, and being a standard size, also fits directly into the pockets of my leather and textile jackets.

It doesn't offer the length of some larger units – it's two or three inches from my coccyx – but as it gives you the option of using it in your jackets, or in its own carrier, it's a surprisingly versatile piece of protection. The back protector insert is also available on its own for £34.99.







# HONEST ADVENTURE TYRES

If most of your biking time is spent on Tarmac, do you really need extreme off-road rubber? Avon doesn't think so...

TESTED BY: Tony Carter

**T**yre technology has transformed over the last decade or so, but it's still about compromises.

Choosing a tyre best suited to an adventure bike means taking a long, honest look at what type of riding you're really likely to be doing; if you're constantly riding through mud and loose earth, you'll be looking for something with a fairly aggressive tread pattern to cut into the muck. The trade-off is rubber that can move around too much on smooth, hard Tarmac; if you've ever ridden a trail bike on the road, you'll know what we mean.



The thin cuts are sipes that control temperature and help shift water.

A huge proportion of adventure bikes spend the vast majority of their time on the hard stuff, and it's here that cornering grip is of course so important. It's no good having a tyre that squirms around when tackling the Stelvio Pass. Or the Watford bypass.

## DESIGNED FOR THE ROAD

Avon says it took two full years to develop the new TrailRider tyre, and it's specifically designed for the adventure bike rider who's most likely to be riding on the road. That means high mileage, good grip, stability and impeccable performance under heavy loads.

Using technology from the other rubber in its range, the Melksham-based manufacturer has incorporated an Advanced Variable Belt construction to control sidewall flex. Both tyres are silica-rich, promised to enhance wet grip, while the rear is a multi-compound construction (softer on the edge, harder on the centre) to extend the tyre's life

when riding in a straight line.

Sipes in the radial TrailRiders are small cuts that create extra grooves, improving water-displacement and controlling the tyre's temperature. Avon's 3D sipes have interlocking points inside that are designed to limit tread flex, but still allow the rubber to warm up quickly; when upright, they're open, but lean the tyre over and the sipes' 'teeth' cut into the pattern, effectively closing up to increase the level of grip when leant right over.

It's claimed to be designed for 90% road use, and 10% off-road use – with the high level of silica and 'Enhanced Aqua Flow' tread pattern, this is clearly a tyre designed primarily to get you through all weathers on most European roads. So ask yourself... what riding do you really do?

## HOW WELL DO THEY WORK?

We rode almost 200 miles on big adventure bikes across a variety of road types during the day-long launch, where the TrailRiders

performed extremely well. We didn't venture off the Tarmac, but we did take in some autobahns to confirm that even in excess of 120mph, stability and predictability is superb.

Outright grip was balanced, which allowed for a high angle of lean – in terms of feel, it was certainly on a par with many sportsbike tyres.

There were no signs of wear on the centre of the tread after our day of testing (high speeds for so long would normally show small tears in the centre tread, but none were visible on the TrailRider).

I did have one moment with the TrailRider that showed how composed the rubber is – I turned into a long left hander, crossing over a wide strip of over-banding and the tyres slid for a fraction of a second before instantly composing themselves.

With the feedback and stability on offer, first impressions are that the TrailRider is a confidence-inspiring tyre for the road-based adventurer.



# WIN A PAIR OF TRAILRIDERS

We've got three pairs of these great new tyres to give away,

worth a total of **£600!**



We were so impressed with the Avon TrailRider's road-going ability that we've managed to secure a set each for three MSL readers. All you have to do is enter our fantastic FREE prize draw. Entries close on Friday, September 4, 2015, and three lucky winners will be able to choose their tyre size.

## FITMENTS AVAILABLE

Avon's new TrailRider is available now in six front sizes and 12 rears, with radial and bias-ply constructions. The rubber is aimed at middleweight and large-capacity adventure sport bikes, including the BMW GS range, Suzuki's V-Strom 650 and 1000, Yamaha's Super Tenere, KTM's Adventure and the Triumph Tiger 800 and Explorer.

**Front fittings:** 80/90-21 48S; 90/90-21 54V; 100/90-19 57H; 110/80R19 59V; 120/70R19 60V; 120/70ZR17 58W

**Rear fittings:** 110/80-18 58S; 120/80-18 62S; 120/90-17 64S; 130/80-17 65H; 140/80-18 70S; 130/80R17 65H; 140/80R17 69V; 150/60R17 66H; 150/70R17 69V; 160/60ZR17 69W; 170/60R17 72V; 180/55ZR17 73W

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[www.mslmagazine.co.uk/competitions](http://www.mslmagazine.co.uk/competitions)

Or send your entry form to MSL September 2015 Avon Tyres competition, Mortons Media Group Ltd, PO Box 99, Horncastle, Lincs LN9 6LZ

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## Shoei Hornet ADV

TESTED BY: Bruce Wilson | £449.99 | [www.feridax.com](http://www.feridax.com) | 01384 413 841

I've been testing Shoei's adventure lid relentlessly over the past four months – before this I had the original Hornet for a few years, but I'm already much more of a fan of the second-generation product. Why? Lots of reasons, with the biggest draw being the visor detachment system; I ride a lot of green lanes, but I also do motocross. I wear goggles for the latter, whereas a visor's my preference for when there's road miles to be ridden.

The problem with the old lid, and on the rival Arai Tour X-4, is that you have to physically unscrew the peak and the visor system on those models, before bolting the peak back on separately once the visor's removed. It takes forever, and each time you repeat the procedure, you risk damaging the slots of the soft plastic screws. Or losing them, for that matter. On the Hornet ADV you just pull down a retaining clip – like you would on all road-focused Shoei lids – and the visor pops off, with refitting proving just as easy.

Aesthetically speaking, the ADV is much more aggressively styled than the Hornet that came before it, with the heavily slotted peak being a real stand-out feature on the helmet. Likewise, advancements to the chin and rear vents give the lid a totally different look, and it's noticeable how much cooler the channelled air makes the product feel when you're sweating it out off-road. There are now six exhaust vents at the back, and the repositioned chin inlet means that you don't

get a mouthful of muck when you're riding through really fine dust, because the venting tract is completely different and raised higher in the stubbier chin-bar.

I initially suffered quite a bit of discomfort in the ADV, before removing a small amount of padding that sits around the ear. As with the older version, the padding is both removable and washable, so getting to the source of my niggle didn't take long at all. I've already washed the cheek and 3D centre padding a few times, and it's retained its shape, which is great news for me, because I love the way this helmet feels. The entire inner padding design is different to the original's, with the biggest benefit being the ADV's tendency to stay snugly planted regardless of pace.

Having recently spent a weekend blasting through trails in the Brecons, I first had to make my way down to the Swansea region from Lincolnshire, riding on a naked bike. If ever there were a test to check the comfort of a peaked lid, this was it. The ADV seems to hold my face more evenly than the original Hornet, which had a tendency to pivot skywards at speed. I also found the new lid to be quieter, and the buffeting was far less. Other points to note are how much easier the vents can be adjusted on the go, owing to their larger tab sizes, and the double-D

fastener, which many prefer for its infinite adjustability.

A final thing to praise is the toughness of the helmet. As is often the case on green lanes, it's natural to find yourself head-butting the odd branch out of the way, but nothing so far has even scratched the stunning paint finish on the multi-composite fibre helmet, let alone damaged any of the plastic protruding parts of the ADV. If you couldn't tell, I'm massively impressed by it.

The peak works well, even at speed.



The visor clips on as easily as any other Shoei.



Vents are very effective, keeping my head cool.



The interior is easy to remove and wash.



## TomTom Rider 400 Premium Pack

**TESTED BY:** John Milbank  
**£399.99 | [www.tomtom.com](http://www.tomtom.com)**

If I could only buy one accessory for any bike, it'd be the new TomTom Rider. While it takes all the stress out of business trips that see me needing to get from A to B in a specific time, it's also transformed my pleasure rides, and made touring more enjoyable.

There are three buying options, all with free lifetime updates to the mapping, and lifetime live traffic (when connected to a data-enabled phone): the 40, which comes with Western Europe (23 countries) for £279.99; the £319.99 400, which comes with all 45 European countries mapped and lifetime speed camera updates; and the 400 Premium Pack, which at £399.99 also includes a car mount, locking bike bracket kit and a carry case.

I think the extra £40 to have all of Europe is worth the expense of the 400; the speed camera updates are also handy, and are proving accurate. It's also worth noting that the 40 has 8GB of internal memory, while the 400 has 16GB. You can add a MicroSD card, but the other stumbling block if you're considering upgrading the Western Europe map to full Europe is that you won't get the free lifetime updates – a single purchase costs £29.97, while a year (four updates) costs £35.97.

For a further £80, the premium kit is good value when you consider that the car mounting kit

**The route, petrol stations and points of interest are all clearly shown on the map and the sidebar. The display switches to a 3D view when riding.**

(it's a powerful sucker for the windscreen) includes an excellent two-port 12v USB charger and costs £49.99, while the anti-theft kit that secures the unit on your bike costs £64.99. The case is £24.99, so you're getting a total of £139.97 of accessories in the bundle. The lock is only really good enough for popping into the services for a break, not leaving the unit attached outside overnight. However, especially with the live traffic updates and its built-in speaker, the Rider is a fantastic car sat-nav. I consider the car mount an essential item,

so if you can afford it, go for the Premium pack.

The navigation over several thousand miles in four countries has been superb. Audio on my bike is linked through my Interphone, giving clear directions with spoken street names, and the screen is clear in all but direct sunlight (moving my body to create a shadow cures any glare when the sun's behind me). The graphics are very simple to follow, with major junctions showing an illustration of the road layout, along with the lane to take.

The unit can be rotated through 90° for a landscape or portrait view (I find this a bit of a gimmick, never taking it out of the wide layout), while a vertical bar on the left of the display shows the distance to key points, destination and petrol stations.

This is a superb idea for bikes, giving you confidence that you'll make it to the next fuel stop. It only shows filling stations on the route, so some motorway services that are just off a roundabout might not display.

Of course, the TomTom will still allow you to search for all filling stations nearby, including those off your route, if you do get desperate.

A major selling point of the Rider is 'Plan a thrill' – choose a destination by searching, or touch the location on the easy-to-navigate map, then pick one of three levels of twistiness, and three altitudes; the TomTom will look for what it considers to be the most exciting route.

When tapping the screen to select a destination, the Rider will plan a circular route that includes this location. If you choose to pull up the 'set destination' menu, you can search for any location, and are given a one-way route.

### PLANNING A THRILL

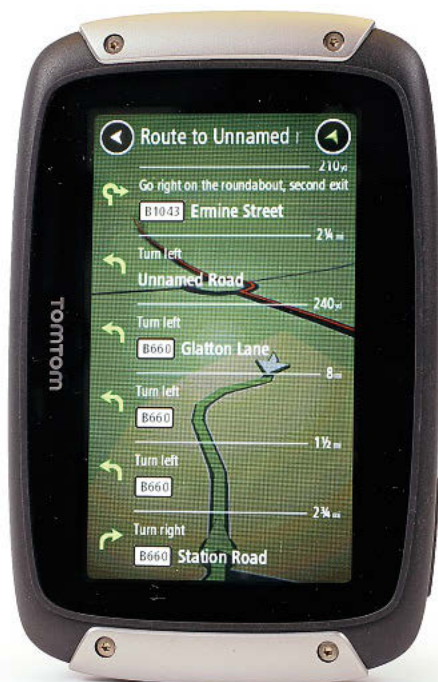
A huge database in the mapping means that most points of interest – including hotels – are included; I had no bother finding my accommodation in Europe. When trying the unit on home turf, it's easy to argue with it over what's the most enjoyable road, but the algorithm is still very good.

On a recent tour I sat in my Belgian hotel room with nothing more than the Rider; I zoomed into the map and found somewhere that looked interesting. Asking it to plan a thrill, it took me on some superb roads that let me discover Belgium and Luxembourg. I knew how long I'd be out. The next day



**The locking kit is handy when you leave the bike briefly.**





The Micro SD card is a bit of a fiddle.

The vertical orientation is clever, though I don't really tend to use it.



The Premium pack includes a car mount, charger and case, plus the locking kit for your bike.



from Belgium into France, I set my location and ensured I planned a 'winding route'. This took in some stunning scenery, while introducing me to parts of the area I never knew existed. It was also very easy to add a stop for a chocolatier on the way...

Some of the roads were a bit too tight or rough for an all-out sportsbike, and it's hard to know what you're going to find. However, for most motorcycles, it's a huge amount of fun.

## GET CONNECTED

You can download GPX files and import them (select the correct filename, not the one with an underscore in front of it) by connecting the unit to a computer via USB, or by using a MicroSD card; until a wireless connection is added (a likely future update), this would be the most convenient method.

TomTom uses Tyre – a third-party software – for PC-based route planning, but there's no Mac version. You can use other software to generate your GPX files, but this is where TomTom falls down for some. I know of users that run it with Garmin's Base Camp (Mac and PC), but this relies on having a Garmin device to get detailed maps. As a Mac user, and not tending to plan many routes on the computer, I use Google Maps, then copy the page URL into [www.gpsvisualizer.com/convert\\_input](http://www.gpsvisualizer.com/convert_input), where I can export the GPX file. It's a little

clunky, but it works. When using 'Plan a thrill' it's possible to pinch-and-zoom your way around the excellent map a lot quicker than on previous models, and setting way-points is simply a matter of tapping the location. Where you have specific roads in mind, you'll probably still want to use a computer for planning, but after my experience in Belgium I'm happy to tell the Rider where I want to go, then let it decide on the route.

The built-in battery has an excellent capacity, offering enough power for rides of several hours without connecting it to your bike. The Rider uses a capacitive screen (as on smartphones), which is brighter than the older touchscreens. Unlike your phone though, it works with gloves on, and even in the rain. I've used it in all weathers with no problems at all.

Don't underestimate the value of the live traffic data when you're on the bike – yes, we can filter through, but if a motorway is closed due to an incident, we're still stuck. The TomTom will also offer faster routes if it finds them.

The new TomTom Rider is a stunning piece of kit – I use it on all but the most local trips, have a second bike mount for popping it on road-test machines, and use it without fail in the car (where it's saved me enough time to get out for a hack on the bike when I get home). Strongly recommended.

GPSVisualizer.com allows you to paste the URL from a Google map into its 'Convert a file' page, then export it as a GPX to the TomTom.

## The importance of networking

To use the Rider's live traffic and speed cameras, you do need a data-enabled smartphone. Connecting via an iPhone is very simple, with the Bluetooth network tethering automatically re-enabled when the two devices are within range. As is so often the case, the less structured Android platform isn't quite as easy – my work phone (a Samsung Galaxy S4) switches off its tethered data connection, leaving me often realising I need to manually reconnect it once I've set off on my journey. It's down to the way some Android devices are

programmed, but you get used to it if you're not constantly switching between different devices, and fans of Android will no doubt accept it as one of its many 'features'.

Whichever device you use the TomTom with, live traffic saves a lot of time trying to compare Google Maps routes with the sat-nav to decide on the least congested route as the Rider is constantly drawing on numerous sources for the latest data. It's not infallible, but it's generally very accurate. I've grown to trust the decisions it makes, and so far it's not let me down.







## Yamaha RD350

# RACE-BRED REVOLUTIONARY

Considered to be among the most iconic of 1970s metal, the RD was a race-bred two-stroke that changed motorcycling...

WORDS: Roland Brown

**A**ccelerating out of a roundabout with the throttle wide open, the two-stroke engine screaming and a broad grin on my face, it was easy to understand what all the fuss had been about. Even several decades after its launch, Yamaha's RD350 had enough performance and personality to be huge fun to ride – and to live up to its reputation as one of the outstanding middleweights of the Seventies.

In fact the first RD350 has a strong case for being regarded as the greatest middleweight of that fast-changing decade. Of all the excellent two-stroke twins of various capacities that Yamaha built during that period, it was perhaps with this 347cc model that the firm really hit the mark.

The 'Torque Induction' logos on its side panels were what differentiated the RD350 from its predecessor the YR5, but it was the Yamaha's RD initials – standing for Race Developed – that said most about its design and development. When the RD was launched in 1973, Yamaha twins had dominated club and national level 250 and 350cc racing worldwide for several years.

Yamaha had won the last three 250cc world championships too, through Rod Gould, Phil Read and Jarno Saarinen. And although Giacomo Agostini still held the 350cc crown on a four-stroke works MV Agusta, the TZ350's numerous successes included Don Emde's giant-killing Daytona 200 victory in 1972, and Saarinen's win there a year later.

Yamaha's road-going twins, which were air-cooled unlike the liquid-cooled TZs, had a distinguished history of their own. The RD350 was developed from

the YR5, which had been launched in 1970 and in turn traced its design back several years further to the firm's first 347cc model, the YR1. The motor's basic layout of 180° crankshaft and cylinder dimensions of 64 x 54mm had remained all that time.

Along with a subtle but effective restyle, the RD350's main innovations were its reed-valve intake system – called Torque Induction by Yamaha – plus its six-speed gearbox and disc front brake. The reed valves, one located between each 28mm Mikuni carburettor and its cylinder, improved intake efficiency by reducing the amount of mixture that was spat back.

As one magazine tester explained in typically colourful Seventies language, Torque Induction allowed hairy intake timing without the motor suffering from low-speed indigestion. This allowed Yamaha to boost top-end power while giving useful performance and cleaner running at low revs. The RD350's peak output of 39bhp at 7500rpm was 3bhp up on the YR5's figure.

Like its contemporaries, the RD relied on a contact-breaker (rather than electronic) ignition, but it incorporated Yamaha's Autolube oil system rather than requiring oil to be added to its fuel by hand, as was still common in the early Seventies. It also gained a six-speed gearbox (although curiously bikes sold in some markets had the top ratio blanked off), complete with modern-style left-foot change and one down, five up pattern.

Chassis layout was mostly similar to that of the YR5, based on a twin-downtube steel frame that held typically slender front forks, plus twin shocks that were adjustable for preload. The one notable change was that front brake, which was a single 267mm disc in place of the old twin-leading-shoe drum.







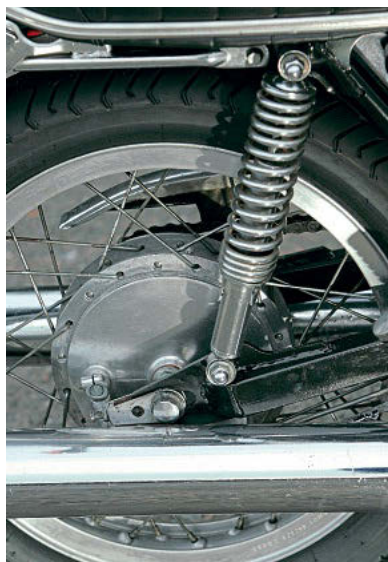
Unlike many systems at the time, its caliper featured twin opposed pistons rather than a sliding caliper.

Styling owed much to previous Yamahas including the YR5, but a larger, 15 litre fuel tank, longer seat and black-finished engine gave a more substantial appearance. Although its slightly raised bars and fairly forward-set footrests gave little clue about its sporty nature, the RD was an attractive machine. The wide handlebars and generous steering lock combined with the light weight to make it effortlessly manoeuvrable.

Also contributing to the Yam's ease of use in town was its smooth low-rev performance, which was notably better than that of its YR5 predecessor. Although the response to a tweak of the throttle at 4000rpm or below was gentle, the RD generally pulled cleanly in the lower gears, with no sign of the plug-fouling tantrums with which some of its predecessors had rewarded gentle treatment.

But it was still at higher revs that the Yamaha was far happier, because the moment its tach needle reached 5000rpm, the RD350 was transformed. Its exhaust note hardened from a flat drone to an excited zing, and the bike leapt forward, soon charging past the 90mph mark despite its unhelpful high-barred aerodynamics. Some testers reported 100mph-plus top speeds although the true two-way average maximum was generally just short of the ton.

Provided it was ridden hard, the Yamaha delivered thrills out of all proportion to its size. Its performance certainly impressed the testers of the day, especially the



**ABOVE:** There's a single leading shoe rear brake.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** Twin-piston front caliper still performs well.

**ABOVE LEFT:** The RD transforms at 5000rpm.



one from US magazine *Cycle Rider*, who wrote: "The performance and acceleration of the RD is nothing short of amazing.... The power-to-weight ratio is so great that if one isn't careful they will unexpectedly find the front-end lofted quite high in the air when accelerating hard in a low gear."

Chassis performance was also pretty capable, the RD's light weight helping to make it impressively agile, while also generally staying reassuringly stable. Its short wheelbase contributed to the way it could be flicked into bends with the merest nudge on those wide bars. And although its suspension couldn't match the taut feel of the best Italian contemporaries, the Yamaha gave a firm, reasonably well-controlled ride without being too harsh over bumps.

That remained true even when it was ridden very hard, as the tester from another US mag, *Cycle Guide*, enthused: "The first time you really stuff the 350 into a tight corner, you begin to understand about its road-racing ancestry. You enter the corner wondering if you're going to make it; you leave the same corner wondering why you didn't enter it faster."

Braking was well up to the job, too. The Yam's front disc reportedly even worked well in the wet – unlike many contemporaries, – and combined with the reliable rear drum and the bike's light weight to give stopping performance to match just about anything on the road. Testers also raved about its high level of paint and chrome finish, good switchgear and even its hinged and lockable fuel cap. Seat comfort was regarded as nothing special, but for a pure-bred sports bike the Yamaha was impressively practical.

All in all the RD350 was a brilliant effort: quick, light, fun to ride and even reasonably practical. It was successful in the UK and elsewhere, outselling rivals including Kawasaki's S2 350 and Suzuki's GT380, reinforcing Yamaha's reputation – which was also being enhanced on the world's racetracks – as the firm for high-performance lightweights. Apart from fresh colours Yamaha made barely any changes in the next couple of years.

Even so, the RD350's life was fairly short. The RD400C that followed it in 1976 was even stronger, its longer-stroke 398cc engine increasing midrange performance and raising the peak output to 40bhp. Faster and better still was the 47bhp, liquid-cooled RD350LC that continued the line in 1980, before itself being replaced by the bikini-faired RD350LC YPVS 'Power Valve' three years later.

**BELOW:** Laying flat on the tank, the RD can just touch 100mph







**'You enter the corner wondering if you're going to make it; you leave the same corner wondering why you didn't enter it faster'**

All were fine, significant models that deserve a place in Yamaha's hall of fame. And they all owed a debt to that first RD350 – the bike with which the tuning-fork firm's middleweight two-strokes came of age.

### WHAT'S IT LIKE TO RIDE?

This restored, 1974-model Yam looked almost new, rather than like a bike from the long-ago year in which President Nixon resigned over Watergate, Lord Lucan disappeared and Phil Read won MV Agusta's last 500cc title to end the four-stroke era. And it started up as efficiently as it would have done when new, needing just one or two gentle prods of the kickstarter before bursting into life with an evocative blend of exhaust crackle and two-stroke fumes.

My first impression was of how small and light the RD felt, which is no surprise as it weighed 143kg dry and had a wheelbase of just 1321mm. This might have been a cutting-edge, race-developed sports machine, but it was also impressively docile and easy to ride. More to the point it was quick enough to be a blast, hitting 80mph quickly and screaming along enthusiastically provided I kept the revs up with plenty of use of the sweet-shifting box.

One slight downer was that above about 6000rpm the Yam passed a fair bit of vibration, especially through its seat, which made the engine's incessant demand for revs slightly tiresome at times. Contemporary reports generally rated the RD very smooth, so either I'm less tolerant than those riders or this bike had understandably got a little more rough in its middle age.

I didn't have many complaints about the chassis though. Handling was excellent for a small and light bike that was predictably flickable, yet also stayed more stable than I'd expected given the age of its slightly flimsy looking suspension components. In bends it made good use of its relatively modern tyre blend of Avon TT100 front and Bridgestone BT54 rear, both of which were doubtless superior to the rubber the bike would have worn when new.

I was equally impressed by the front disc brake, which stopped the ultra-light Yamaha very abruptly with no



**ABOVE:** The air-cooled parallel-twin is very smooth in low revs.

hint of grab. In fact my day spent thrashing around on the RD was so enjoyable that, as I rode back towards London in the gathering gloom to deliver it back, I was seriously wondering whether this would be the first classic test that I would end by making an offer to buy the bike.

Then it suddenly slowed to a halt, possibly a victim of the charging problem that is one of the RD's weak spots. Reminded by that incident of the unpredictable nature of old bikes, especially two-stroke sports machines, I didn't buy it. But whoever ended up owning this RD should have plenty of enjoyment from a bike that in most respects fully lived up to the model's high reputation.

### WHAT THEY COST

Prices of the RD350 are roughly comparable to those for later Yamaha twins such as the RD400 and RD350LC. Exceptional examples are advertised at over £5000, although you should be able to find a decent runner for half that amount.

"For a nice original or restored one you're looking at £2000-£4000," says Martin Taylor of Kent-based Taymar Motorcycles ([www.taymar-racing.co.uk](http://www.taymar-racing.co.uk)), who specialises in old Yamaha two-strokes. "For a working example you'd expect to pay £1000-£1500, and even a basket case with documents would go for £500-700."





#### FRONT BRAKE

The single 267mm disc was backed up by a drum rear and did a good job of slowing the RD, helped by the bike's light weight of just 143kg dry.

#### HANDLEBARS

Like all the sportiest middleweights of the mid-Seventies, the Yam came with a high, wide, one-piece handlebar that did little for its high-speed aerodynamics.

#### PETROL TANK

The RD's main styling feature was its rounded, 15 litre fuel tank, which echoed the YR5's tank and differentiated those models from the later 'coffin-tank' RDs.

#### ENGINE

The 347cc, two-stroke parallel twin, which had a 180° crankshaft layout, was mechanically little changed from the YR1 unit from the late Sixties.

#### CARBURETTORS

The RD's most important innovation was the Mikuni carbs' reed-valve intake design, advertised by the 'Torque Induction' logo on the side panels.

#### SEAT

This bike's slightly sloped seat is a non-standard and slightly slimmer version of the thick and well-padded dual-seat that the RD would have been fitted with when new.

#### FRAME

The twin-downtube frame was slim and not particularly strong, but contributed to the bike's light weight and was well up to keeping the engine's 39bhp in check.

## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

The RD350 is a simple air-cooled bike that can give plenty of enjoyable riding. But it's also now 40-odd years old, they're less easy to find than the later RD models (because fewer were sold) and has a few weak points. So while it's possible to find a bargain, it's also easy to land yourself with trouble.



Always ensure you get receipts for any engine work, as a pretty motor could hide costly problems.

"If it's up and running, charges and doesn't make any horrendous noises it should be fairly reliable," says Taymar's Martin Taylor. "The problems they have are just the usual two-stroke issues. Wear of the bores and crankshaft are things to watch out for. There's a cover on the left side of the engine, you can get at the end of the crank and try moving it up and down. If there's any movement it indicates that the main bearings are worn.

"Also it's a good idea to check that it's charging properly. Just stick a multi-meter across the battery, run the bike up and check it's charging, because the brushes on the generator wear out and they're not available. You have to source second-hand ones or make something from another bike, but that's not easy to do."

Don't assume that because a bike looks good and its engine runs, it's all fine, warns Martin. "Engine receipts are more useful than anything else. We get a lot of bikes that look really pretty but have major engine problems. It runs so people have painted the covers but there are crankshaft or gearbox issues, or the carbs are wrong.

"Because a bike starts and runs people tend to ignore those things, but those twin-cylinder engines can cost from £800 to £2000 to restore, if people want us to make them look good as well as run right. Most people can do the pretty bits themselves but the engine is a different matter, and Yamaha's second-hand parts are very expensive."

Parts such as tanks, seats and especially original exhausts can be hard to find, but there's better news if you find an early RD with a five-speed box. The sixth ratio is actually in there, prevented from being used by a blanking plug in the selector drum. It's a relatively simple job to remove the plug and make the top ratio available.

## Specification

### YAMAHA RD350 (1974)

**Engine:** 347cc air-cooled parallel twin two-stroke

**Bore x stroke:** 64 x 54mm

**Compression ratio:** 6.6:1

**Carburation:** 2 x 28mm Mikunis

**Claimed power:** 39bhp @ 7500rpm

**Transmission:** six speed

**Electrics:** 12v battery; 35/35W headlamp

**Frame:** Tubular steel duplex cradle

**Suspension:** (F) Telescopic, no adjustment; (R) Twin shock absorbers, adjustable preload

**Brakes:** (F) 267mm disc, twin-piston caliper; (R) 178mm single leading shoe drum

**Tyres:** (F) 3.00 x 18in (Avon TT100) (R) 3.60 x 18in (Bridgestone BT54)

**Wheelbase:** 1321mm

**Seat height:** 787mm

**Fuel capacity:** 15 litres

**Weight:** 143kg dry

**Supplied by:** RAP Superbikes, [www.rapbikes.com](http://www.rapbikes.com)



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**HONDA VFR750FL** 1990, single s/arm, MoT Feb 2016, lots of receipts, rebuilt forks, Hagon rear shock, Pipercross a/filter, s/s exhaust system, with all panels, £1450. Tel. 01794 515685. Hants.



**KAWASAKI G1** 1998, XZ6R, red/black, MoT Sept 2015, 39k miles, good condition, spare exhaust, Haynes workshop manual, £1550 ono. Tel. 01472 210918. Lincs



**KTM 650 ADVENTURE** 2004, 30,241 miles, MoT Apr 16, new chain and sprockets, new battery, Scottolier, new oil change and filters, f/tyre 4mm, r/tyre 4mm, £2000. Tel. 07813 762115. Bristol.



**KTM DUKE 200** 2014, year's warranty left, 1,070 miles, vgc, ABS, Metzler tyres, h/guard, ABS, digital display, 60% more power than 125cc, £3000 ovno. Tel. 07508 521540. London.



**MOTO GUZZI Nevada** 750cc, 2012, Aquila Nera, MoT Jan 16, 21,500 miles, engine bars, screen, rack/backrest, c/stand, service/handbook, vgc, £3750 ono Tel. 01977 510546. W Yorks.



**SUZUKI BANDIT** GSF 600N, 2000, MoT 15/5/16, 16,261 miles, £1000 plus p&p. Tel. 07730 481072. W Mids



**SUZUKI BANDIT 600N** 1998, after crash, needs engine casing repair or new engine, otherwise all good, 28,000 mileage, Scottolier, £500 ono. Tel. 07562 708728. Essex



**SUZUKI GSX750 T** reg, 1999, MoT September recent front tyre engine bars, classic insurance, £1150. Tel. 01286 882776. North Wales.



**SUZUKI GW250 INAZUMA** better than new, all fittings copper greased, garaged, fender extender, screen, 2000 miles, 2013, £2000 ovno Tel. John 07901 621607. S Yorks



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**TRIUMPH DAYTONA** 955i, 2002, 51 reg, met silver/black, 56,600 miles, vgc, regularly serviced, current owner since 2011, MoT end May 2016, £1650 ono. Tel. 07970 235358. Bucks.



**TRIUMPH SPEED TRIPLE** 2009, fsh, MoT, lots of extras, 10,500 miles on clock, £5500 ono. Tel. William 01260 270894 after 5pm. Cheshire



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**TRIUMPH THUNDERBIRD** 1998, Sport, 25k, red/black, exc cond, MoT Jun 16, original and solo seats, standard and loud pipes, £3950. Tel. 07808 262111. Oxfordshire.



**VICTORY HAMMER** 2006, 15,477 miles, very good condition, Stage 1, full s/h, dry rides only. Tel. 07974 644137. Warks.



**YAMAHA FAZER 600** showroom condition, low mileage, top box, kept in house, £3000 ovno. Tel. 07508 839537. Norfolk.

## FOR SALE

**BMW 1200RT** Touratech stainless crash bars (up to 2013 model), vgc, £200; BMW rear soft tail bag, vgc, £75; BMW charger, £65. Tel. 01772 631372. Lancs.

**HARLEY DAVIDSON 48** full Stage One kit, Vance & Hines pipes, V&H air cleaner, Avon Whitewalls, 926 miles, 2012, as new, £8695 ono Tel. 07772 190190; 01708 641097. Essex.

**HONDA CBF 1000** full brake pad set, unused, still in packaging, £35; 120/70 and 160/55 Michelin Pilot tyres for above, part worn, good cond, £80. Tel. 01772 631372. Lancs.

**HONDA CBF125** RCT white, vgc, two mature owners, 7,628 miles, MoT, Honda rack and box, good tyres and brakes, £1600 ono. Tel. 01443 218615. Mid Glam.

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**PAIR RICHIA** black leather jeans, 34W, 32L, very good condition, £20 Tel. 01708 450968. Essex.

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# Sign of the times

**Steve Rose**



**W**hat's your dream biking road? I'm guessing, like most of us, it involves a whole load of challenging corners, probably a mountain or two and maybe an alp for good measure. Now I don't know about you, but

whenever I end up on such a stretch of heaven, most of the ride is spent trying not to target-fixate on the crash barriers, the grave, and the valley floor half a mile below.

I'm not sure how many riders go over the edge on any given year, but I remember watching that Conor Cummins crash at the TT a few years back when his bike went one way and him the other (find it online, and be thankful he survived it), thinking 'Maybe I should stick to the Fens for a while.'

Last Tuesday I spent a day with someone who watched that footage and came to a different conclusion – that motorcycling has a gap for an app that will let people find you should your ride end in the same way. Three years on and the system is almost ready to launch. It works via your smartphone's GPS and, should the worst happen, leaving you in the middle of nowhere, unconscious and hidden halfway down a mountain, the system will automatically call 999, inform the authorities you have a serious problem, and give the emergency services your exact co-ordinates.

That's a very impressive system. If it can be developed to automatically ring your loved ones and give them a believable excuse for being two hours late home from the pub on a Wednesday night, then I think its developers can rule the world.

Normally I'm sceptical about these things. In 30 years of riding I've never managed to ride off the edge of a cliff. But I've never had a serious car crash either and that doesn't stop me wearing a seat belt. With more and more motorcyclists seeking some serious adventure and heading for the middle of nowhere, having something that will not only tell the authorities that you have crashed, but also exactly where you are is as essential as wearing a crash helmet.

Funnily enough I was thinking about this, sat in a truck stop on the way home when my phone flashed into life. The text message was simple, "Simon's been knocked off his bike. Heading off now to collect the wreckage. Think he's okay." Thankfully Simon was okay... or at least not as bad as he could have been – a gash on the leg, broken wrist and two fingers containing 15 pieces of bone where there used to be three complete bones apiece.

He's never yet managed to ride off the edge of a cliff, but Steve's still taking precautions...

What caused his accident was the age-old twittery of a car driver going all the way round a roundabout in the left-hand lane while Simon (correctly) used the right hand lane for going straight on. And that got me thinking – as well as clever apps to alert the emergency services, what we also need are car-focused versions of those horrendous 'Bends... dead ahead' or 'To die for?' signs that plague our rural roads and effectively prevent any parent ever letting their offspring go anywhere near a motorcycle.

My first sign would be to raise awareness of driving while phoning. Maybe a silhouette of the Grim Reaper holding a phone receiver with some suitably 1960s public-information-film wording like 'Hello... Death calling'. Next up is one about eating and driving: old Grim holding a burger with the words 'Last supper?'

How about one for dawdlers: 'Low speed kills – 18 fatalities on this stretch of road in the last 12 months while overtaking dawdling drivers... like you.'

No, don't stop me, I'm on a roll now. 'Facial inferno – discarded cigarettes kill motorcyclists'. Another with a picture of a nervous-looking naked man behind bars saying 'Use your mirrors – not killing someone is better than prison showers' and of course (for Simon) a roundabout sign with the correct lanes painted on in fluoro colours, and a picture of a ferret drinking gravy with the words 'Roundabouts – even ferrets drinking gravy know which flipping lane to use'.

Would they work? Yes, probably, but the truth is that there are so many stupidly incomprehensible things that people do in cars that you'd need a different sign every 20 yards which would make the earth around an A-road sink five feet under the weight, and then the signs would be hidden.

Maybe the better answer is to redesign the car so that the driver has all distractions removed. Make them inherently unstable and difficult to control, requiring considerable thought and physical input to get from A to B. Maybe also take the driver out of the steel cocoon and sit them up high, exposed to the elements, feeling part of the environment they are driving through. Oh, hold on, that'd be a motorbike.

Get well soon Simon.

## Who is Rose?

Steve Rose is a high mileage road rider. A former editor of *Bike* and *RiDE* magazine and one time back street bike dealer. He's also one of the UK's most experienced and trusted road testers



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